

Lesson Two

(Mark 1:16 - 2:12)

Jesus Calls Four Apostles

(Mark 1:16 - 20)

16 As Jesus walked by Lake Galilee, he saw two fishermen, Simon and his brother Andrew, catching fish in the lake with a net. 17 Jesus said to them, "Come with me and I will teach you to catch men." 18 At once they left their nets and went with him.

19 He went a little farther on and saw two other brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee. They were in their boat getting their nets ready. 20 As soon as Jesus saw them he called them; they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and went with Jesus.

Mark does not show us the initial stages of the public ministry of Christ, but immediately begins with Jesus preaching in Galilee. As we see Jesus call four fishermen to be his first apostles, we note that they were already his disciples (compare John 1:35 - 45; Luke 5:1-11). We see Jesus officially *identify* (appoint, ordain) them in Mark 3:14ff. We may also read into this the fact that *response* to the gospel involves *following* Jesus (that is, living his life-style). The whole New Testament is evidence of the fact that the Good News cannot be separated from the *person* of the Messiah. If He is the *preacher* of the Good News, He is equally the *content* of the message, and one will find it impossible to believe the gospel in any other way than by "reaching out through faith to become united to Him." "It is through faith that all of you are God's sons in union with Christ Jesus. You were baptized into union with Christ, and now you are clothed, so to speak, with the life of Christ himself" (Gal. 3:26-27).

It is Jesus himself who calls men and women to become his disciples. (Notice John 6:44-45. God calls through the message.) Mark sharpens the contrast to bring out this one essential lesson. Jesus calls people who respond by at once leaving everything to go with Him! Does Jesus call all disciples to be "fishers of men," or is this a special call to the apostles? The answer must be -- both. None of us can be "apostles" as were the Twelve plus Paul. They had a special mission to carry out (compare Acts 10:40 - 42). Yet who could deny the fact that each Christian is to use his or her talents to bring others to Christ (compare John 1:41, 45). We give our lives to Christ, and he gives them back to us to use for his glory. The disciples of Christ are farmers, mechanics, doctors, lawyers, teachers, etc., etc., who in the process of their everyday living *put Jesus first in everything!* The calling of these four demonstrates the *authority* of Jesus in each of our lives!

The Lake of Galilee (also called Gennesaret) was named for the province of Galilee on its western side. It was about thirteen miles long and six miles wide. The Jordan river runs through it and on into the Dead Sea. Jesus lived, taught, and did most of his miracles on its borders. Fishing was a prosperous trade on the lake (notice the hired men). These four had continued to fish. Now they are called to devote their time to a new work -- catching men for Christ. But this does not mean they immediately gave up fishing forever. We find them continuing to fish (see Luke 5:1-11; John 21:1-14; compare Acts 18:1-4). There is no disgrace in working at a job. The correct picture that

the scripture shows us is that as the demands of their discipleship became greater, they would spend less and less time at their fishing. This in no way discredits the genuineness and real depth of their devotion to Jesus. (In certain situations, a self-supporting missionary may be more effective. Compare Acts 20:34; 1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:8; 1 Cor. 4:12. But different circumstance required different methods, Phil. 4:15-16.) Every Christian is one who has been called to a “higher obligation.”

The Authority of Jesus

(Mark 1:21-28)

21 They came to the town of Capernaum, and on the next Sabbath day Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. 22 The people who heard him were amazed at the way he taught. He wasn't like the teachers of the Law; instead, he taught with authority.

23 Just then a man with an evil spirit in him came into the synagogue and screamed, 24 “What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Are you here to destroy us? I know who you are: you are God's holy messenger!”

25 Jesus commanded the spirit, “Be quiet, and come out of the man!”

26 The evil spirit shook the man hard, gave a loud scream, and came out of him. 27 The people were all so amazed that they started saying to each other, “What is this? Some kind of new teaching? This man has authority to give orders to the evil spirits, and they obey him!”

28 And so the news about Jesus spread quickly everywhere in the region of Galilee.

The synagogue was much like our church, and it was usual for the leaders to invite any man whom they considered competent to speak to the people (compare Acts 13:15). What we know about the teachers of the law shows that they loved to quote what former teachers had said, and so their teaching lacked conviction and motivation.

Mark emphasizes the authority of Jesus. He tells us that Jesus *taught with authority* -- in contrast to the teachers of the law. DeWalt says: “There was no lifeless droning over dry traditions or idle ceremonies, but his teaching was fresh as the morning, original, going to the root of things, authoritative, and burning with Divine fire. It is not strange that the great Teacher whose doctrines have revolutionized the earth, astonished the audiences who listened to him in Judea and Galilee.”

The congregation's amazement at the prophetic type of teaching by Jesus turns to astonishment and alarm as a man with an evil spirit runs into the synagogue and loudly challenges Jesus. Note that as in other cases, the evil spirit *knows* who Jesus *is*. (The evil spirit uses language very similar to 1 Kings 17:18.) Mark shows us that the authority of Jesus extends even to the world of evil spirits. He *commands*: “Be quiet, and come out of the man!” And the evil spirit does so in a clearly visible way! This is for the benefit of the congregation, and they identify Jesus' *teaching* with his authority over evil spirits (vs. 27). The result was that his fame spread everywhere! The purpose of these miracles was to bring glory to God and to the Son (compare John 11:4).

The people of the first century understood the world to be filled with disembodied spirits or demons, who were part of the forces of evil. Compare Eph. 6:12. The Jewish

people probably thought of them as the servants of the Devil (in much the same way that angels served God). These evil spirits had the ability to hurt people, and some were actually subject to the control of these demons. Consider: 1) supernatural strength (Mark 5:20); 2) blindness (Matt. 12:22); 3) predict the future (Acts 16:16); 4) demons knew Jesus (Mark 1:24); 5) Jesus spoke to them (Matt. 8:32); 6) demoniacs spoke of this control (Mark 5:9); 7) Jesus affirmed it (Matt. 12:28); 8) Peter affirmed it (Acts 10:38); 9) apostles affirmed it (Luke 10:17); 10) they could be sent into animals (Mark 5:13). But Satan's power over Christians is limited (1 Cor. 10:13).

Are demons still active today??? This is a difficult question. Some scholars think demon possession ended at 70 A.D. when Jerusalem was destroyed. Certainly we do not seem to see the things which were common at that time. But the scriptures present the world of evil as being a reality, and evil is certainly at work in our society today. Compare Eph. 6:10-18.

Jesus Heals Many People

(Mark 1:29-34)

29 They left the synagogue and went straight to the home of Simon and Andrew; and James and John went with them. 30 Simon's mother-in-law was sick in bed with a fever, and as soon as Jesus got there he was told about her. 31 He went to her, took her by the hand, and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.

32 When evening came, after the sun had set, people brought to Jesus all the sick and those who had demons. 33 All the people of the town gathered in front of the house. 34 Jesus healed many who were sick with all kinds of diseases and drove out many demons. He would not let the demons say anything, because they knew who he was.

That day when Jesus entered Simon Peter's house to heal his mother-in-law, who was sick in bed with a high fever -- would be indelibly impressed on Peter's mind. It is part of Mark's picture to show Jesus as one who waged *all out war* on the forces of evil. This includes sickness -- which often is identified as having its source in the world of evil. The picture is *Jesus the healer*. We see him go to her, take her by the hand, and help her up out of bed. The fever immediately leaves, and so complete is her recovery that she begins to wait on them! The fever was probably malaria (compare Luke 4:38), and this shows the authority of Jesus -- even over human illness.

A side issue is that Peter was married. If this seems strange to anyone, it only shows how much Greek thought has influenced our world. The fact that most of the Lord's closest followers were married men who continued to live with their wives (see 1 Cor. 9:5) is impressive. We can only admire the great things which they were able to do, and their wives could not have been a hindrance. In fact, in Jewish thought, there was something unnatural about celibacy, although Paul tells us that it is a possible option for those who have the "gift" (1 Cor. 7:25-35). In view of the Jewish attitude, note 1 Tim. 3:2.

We live in a time when many make an issue out of *disbelieving* the miracles of Jesus. The reasoning which says: "because Jesus worked miracles, he therefore must be divine" -- will not be accepted by them. Perhaps the best way to approach this, is to say: "if Jesus was divine, then he could have worked miracles." The purpose of these

supernormal things was not simply to impress people with his power, but rather to demonstrate the presence and power of God. It was their spiritual meaning which was most important, but they *had to take place* in order to have any kind of meaning at all! As Mark presents these facts, it is very hard to doubt that physical power to heal originated from Jesus. However, it was possible for people to see these things which Jesus did, and still fail to believe. They were not compelling signs (John 12:37). Since the apostles boldly declared these things, so should we. God the Son has authority over all creation (Matt. 28:18).

The most outstanding thing about the demons continues to be the fact that they *knew who he was*. Whatever might have been his motive for not allowing them to say anything (about who he was), this must have been in order to fulfill this greater purpose. That is, Jesus made his choices and acted on the basis which would lead the greatest number to understand that he was God's Messiah. Yet he did come to die as the world's sin-offering (Luke 9:31), and he must not act in such a way that freedom of choice is denied. His death was the complete victory over the Devil, and we should look to Jesus as a *hero*! Compare Heb. 9:15; 10:5-14.

Jesus Preaches in Galilee

(Mark 1:35-45)

35 Very early the next morning, long before daylight, Jesus got up and left the house. He went out of town to a lonely place, where he prayed.

36 But Simon and his companions went out searching for him; 37 when they found him they said, "Everyone is looking for you."

38 But Jesus answered, "We must go on to the other villages around here. I have to preach in them also, because that is why I came."

39 So he traveled all over Galilee, preaching in the synagogues and driving out demons.

40 A leper came to Jesus, knelt down, and begged him for help. "If you want to," he said, "you can make me clean."

41 Jesus was filled with pity, and reached out and touched him. "I do want to," he answered. "Be clean!" 42 At once the leprosy left the man and he was clean. 43 Then Jesus spoke harshly with him and sent him away at once. 44 "Listen," he said, "don't tell this to anyone. But go straight to the priest and let him examine you; then offer the sacrifice that Moses ordered, to prove to everyone that you are now clean."

45 But the man went away and began to spread the news everywhere. Indeed, he talked so much that Jesus could not go into a town publicly. Instead, he stayed out in lonely places, and people came to him from everywhere.

As Mark shows us this day in the life of Jesus, we see him up before the sun, to pray quietly. This tells us something of the relationship between Jesus and his Father. There may have been some special stress, which created this need to pray, since Mark rarely associates prayer with Jesus (compare 6:46; 14:32-39). But this may have been his normal way of doing. Compare Luke 3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18; 28-29; 11:1; 23:46; Matt. 19:13; John 11:41-42; 12:27-28; Ch. 17. His disciples asked to be taught to pray as he did (Luke 11:1-4).

It may be that Jesus' prayer related to the future of his public ministry. His mission was wider than the area of Galilee. Peter comes looking for him, saying that "Everyone is looking for you." Probably Peter (and the others) felt a deep need for the Lord's presence. This presents one of the two direct statements by Jesus in Mark's Gospel, in which he states his purpose on earth. (The other is 2:17). "I have to preach in them also, because this is why I came." Since the context is healing, it must be of extreme significance that Jesus says he should *be preaching*. This surely indicates how he viewed his basic work. Mark describes his tour of missions, showing that Jesus preached daily in the synagogues, and healed those with spiritual and physical problems. But more than once he returned to Capernaum.

We see something of Jesus' reputation as a man with a dreaded skin disease comes and begs to be healed. ("Leprosy" in the Bible covers a wide range of things, from true leprosy to ringworm.) Mark tells us that Jesus was filled with pity for the man. (Some texts say that *he blazed with anger* -- i.e., at the disease which had made a slave of this man. See NEB.) The fact that Jesus "reached out and touched him," must be viewed in the light of Jewish thought which said that such contact made the one who touched *religiously unclean*. Chrysostom says: "His hand became not unclean from the leprosy, but the leprous body was made clean by his holy hand."

An important part of this healing is that Jesus sternly told the man to keep quiet about it. Why would Jesus want to keep his miracles secret??? The most reasonable answer is that Jesus had no intention of being the center of a popular uprising. The people were looking for a *political* Messiah who would lead a revolt against the Roman Occupation Forces (see 15:7), and longed for the glory of the days of David and Solomon. But Jesus refused to be a political king (compare Matt. 4:8-10; John 6:15; 10:17-18; 12:19). Jesus revealed his Messiahship in such a way that those who *love* him will know him as God's Messenger and through their faith will see him more fully and openly (see John 14:21-24). The way in which even his disciples continued to misunderstand him shows how right Jesus was to adopt this method of working. Note that *healing* was a sign of the eschaton or end-time (compare Luke 4:17-21; Matt. 11:5; Acts 2:16-21).

Authority to Forgive Sins

(Mark 2:1-12)

2 *A few days later Jesus came back to Capernaum, and the news spread that he was at home. 2 So many people came together that there wasn't any room left, not even out in front of the door. Jesus was preaching the message to them, 3 when a paralyzed man, carried by four men, was brought to him. 4 Because of the crowd, however, they could not get the man to Jesus. So they made a hole in the roof right above the place where Jesus was. When they had made an opening, they let the man down, lying on his mat. 5 Jesus saw how much faith they had, and said to the paralyzed man, "My son, your sins are forgiven."*

6 *Some teachers of the Law who were sitting there thought to themselves, 7 "How does he dare talk against God like this? No man can forgive sins; only God can!"*

8 *At once Jesus knew their secret thoughts, so he said to them, "Why do you think such things? 9 Is it easier to say to this paralyzed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to*

say, 'Get up, pick up your mat and walk'? **10** I will prove to you, then, that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. So he said to the paralyzed man, **11** "I tell you, get up, pick up your mat, and go home!"

12 While they all watched, the man got up, picked up his mat, and hurried away. They were all completely amazed and praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

Although this section deals with the healing of a paralyzed man, the purpose is not simply to show the healing power of Jesus (contrast the earlier healings which Mark records). We are shown the deeper issues and conflicts with the religious leaders. It is amazing that the very fact Jesus obeyed the Father's will aroused such controversy and opposition (but compare Matt. 10:34-39).

The incident shows a lesson on the need for faith. Palestinian houses were built with a flat roof, and people slept out on them in good weather. Mark shows us the determination of this man's friends as they carry him up the outside stairs, tear up part of the roof, and lower the paralyzed man down to Jesus with the entire crowd looking on! Luke tells us that many in the crowd were Pharisees and teachers of the Law who had come to investigate this one who healed diseases (see Luke 5:17). And of course Jesus was aware of this.

The account takes a surprising turn in verse five. Both friends and enemies of Jesus were in the crowd. Ultimately he must force a decision about himself, his person, and his mission. He boldly says to the paralyzed man: "My son, your sins are forgiven." Note the healing does not occur at this point. The two things must be clearly separate. The teachers of the Law are shocked! A prophet could speak in God's name (see 2 Sam. 12:13), but could Jesus be a prophet when prophecy seemed to have died out??? Surely this was blasphemy! Only the offended person could forgive the offender! Only God himself can forgive sin! And in this they were correct. But they should have asked the question: Could this man be God??? How different the course of events might have been!

Now, Jesus points out through a question, that two things are involved: forgiveness of sin, and healing. His purpose is to *prove* that the Son of Man (this is a favorite phrase of Jesus for himself) has *authority* to forgive sins! His proof is to heal the man. Remember: *first* Jesus forgave his sins; *second* Jesus heals him from his paralysis. Healing is a humanitarian thing to do: forgiveness has messianic (eschatological) implication. As the formerly paralyzed man walks out carrying his mat, this must have been a thunderous conclusion to the interplay in the crowd. They praised God and said: "We have never seen anything like this!"

Jesus gave visible proof of his authority to grant the invisible (and unprovable) act of forgiveness. This was God's prerogative and impossible for an ordinary man. He claimed authority as the *Son of Man*. This was deliberately *ambiguous*. "Son of Man" could be understood both as "the helpless" (Psalm 34:6), or as a divine title (Luke 22:69-70). He chose to leave an air of mystery around his identity. (Remember, he rejected the political kingship.) The forgiveness of sins, which comes through Jesus, was to be a key issue separating the church from Judaism (see Heb. 10:1-18).

Questions for Discussion

(Mark 1:16-2:12)

1. Was this the first time Jesus had seen Simon and Andrew?
2. Why did these men abandon their business to go with One who offered them no money?
3. Compare Mark 1:16-20; Matt. 4:18-22; Luke 5:1-11. Are these parallel accounts?
4. Why are hired men mentioned in verse 20?
5. How was Jesus able to teach in the synagogue?
6. Didn't everyone teach from the same source of authority? Why were the people amazed?
7. When did the possessed man scream?
8. Is demon possession just another way of describing insanity? Why?
9. Why did Jesus tell the evil spirit to be quiet? Wasn't what the demon said true?
10. In what sense could Jesus destroy the evil spirit? Aren't spirits immortal?
11. List the miraculous elements of the healing of Peter's mother in law.

12. Were any of the apostles married?
13. How did so many people know where to find Jesus?
14. Read Isa. 53:4-5 with Matt. 8:17, and show how it was fulfilled here.
15. Did Jesus have a special reason for prayers?
16. Why didn't Jesus return immediately to Capernaum?
17. Did Jesus come to heal or to preach?
18. Give two qualities which characterized the preaching of Jesus.
19. Is our Savior concerned with our physical and spiritual difficulties? Compare Heb. 4:14-15.
20. How much time was required for the healing to take effect?
21. Did Jesus expect to be king over a political kingdom?
22. How did the paralyzed man and his friends demonstrate their faith?
23. How did Jesus demonstrate his authority?
24. Why didn't Jesus first heal the man, and then forgive his sins?

25. Isn't Jesus divine? Why is he called the "Son of Man"?
26. This is said to be the first step of Jesus toward the Cross. How is this true?
27. Do we find the apostles forgiving sin as Jesus did? See Acts 8:20-23.
28. Are the miracles a help or a hindrance in preaching the gospel today?
29. Is there a place for a healing ministry in the church today? Why?
30. In what way is the Holy Spirit the Spirit of judgment? Compare John 16:1-15.