

The Controversial Christ

Mark 2:1-22

Jesus messianic ministry stirs up controversy with the religious leaders, as he forgives sinners, befriends sinners, claims to be the Bridegroom, and blows up their understanding of religious traditionalism.

Outline

#1: Controversy over Forgiveness (2:1-12)

#2: Controversy Over Friendship (2:13-17)

#3: Controversy Over Fasting (2:18-20)

Two Parables that Explain the Broader Significance of Jesus' Ministry (2:21-22)

Welcome... Not a Christ-follower? Today, we're going to look at what makes Jesus – and Christianity – unique.... We're going to look at three controversies, and two very short parables... [**Pray**].

Recently I heard Nic Ripken share stories of spending time overseas for over thirty years as a missionary in hostile places. (He has a book that is called *The Insanity of God*).

One story that stuck out had to do with a time he was preaching in Malawi. Here he was with his wife, and two little kids with blond hair... Everyone was sitting on the ground in a small hut – with him up on a little platform and pulpit... As he began to preach, he got concerned... As the message got rolling, a man got off the ground and stood beside him. Then another stood beside him on the other side. They had their arms cross, kind of flexing. He thought, “Is this going to end well? Should I have my wife come give a testimony?” 35 people were initially sitting in front of him, but by the end of the sermon about 25 of them are surrounding him! He thought, as a Baptist, “Should I make them go sit down, so I could ask them to come up again for the invitation.”

He found afterward that that in this particular context, standing beside the preacher was their way of saying “Amen.” It was their way of saying, “I agree with him!”

If you want to come on up later, come on...! Just kidding. That's a security problem. But feel free to say Amen!

In this section of Mark's gospel, Jesus is preaching but not everyone is standing beside him.

Some oppose him.

And those who oppose him the most are the religious people.

In these three stories, Jesus provides **theological clarity about his messianic mission, and displays “scandalous grace.”** His theology and his grace put him at odds with the religious leaders.

Chapter 2:1-3:6 are “controversy dialogues.”

Controversy over Forgiveness (2:1-12) – Who can forgive sins but God alone?

Controversy over Friendship (2:13-17) – Why does he eat with sinners and tax collectors?

Controversy over Fasting (2:18-22) – Why don’t your disciples fast?

Controversy over the Sabbath (2:23-28) – Why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?

Controversy over the Sabbath (3:1-6) – they watched him to accuse him...

[There are another set of controversies in 11:27-12:37]

So we see five pictures Grace

Jesus: Forgiver of Sinners

Jesus: Friend of Sinners

Jesus: The Bridegroom for a Sinful Bride

Jesus: Lord of the Sabbath who Gives Rest to the Weary

Jesus: The Restorer of the Desperate

Consequently, some loved Jesus, but some wanted to “destroy him” (3:6).

Some love grace. Some are angered by it.

One thing is for sure: *no one left unaffected by Jesus’ ministry!*

#1: Controversy over Forgiveness (2:1-12)

This first story is sort of like a church. It is a corporate gathering where preaching is taking place.

After his preaching tour around Galilee (Mark 1:39), Jesus returns home to preach.

Again, notice that Jesus doesn’t set up shop to do healings. He’s out preaching, and when the sick comes to him, he has compassion on them as needs arise.

Word ministry is the priority of Jesus.

Perhaps 75 people could fit in this house. Others were probably standing outside.

So, it’s like a small church, or like a big growth group ... only Jesus shows up!

That would be a great growth group experience! “Hey we have a guest! Great? Who is he? “Jesus”.... “I think he should teach.” “I think he should make dinner also.” “And my back hurts, maybe he could lead the prayer time too!”

And actually, this house became a house-church, according to tradition.

What Prompts the Controversy (1-5)

V. 1: Jesus is at home (probably at the home of Peter). Peter and his family probably lived there. Presently, a church built a goofy **looking space-ship of a thing over it.**

V. 2: The house is full! But the atmosphere was intense. Imagine it! The house is packed. The atmosphere is electric – **like a Duke game, only it's Jesus not the devil.** (“Caperneum crazies”)

And Jesus is “**preaching the word.**” His teaching is unlike everyone else's!

You can imagine workers, moms, dads, kids, peaking through the windows, trying to find a seat...

He is preaching about the kingdom of God and the need to repent.

Now, not everyone is buying it. **Crowds doesn't equal disciples.** A lot of people are drawn to Jesus here because he's such a sight to behold. Think about it. We naturally like to watch people who are excellent and certain things – basketball, soccer, opera, acting, etc. Jesus' healings wowed people. So they're attracted, but not all followers. The same is true today. Many attend church services, but have not submitted to Jesus' Lordship.

If you're in the crowd, but not a follower, know that you need to take the next step and submit your life to Jesus.

Vs. 3-4: Four men bring their friend or perhaps a relative of theirs to Jesus.

They **obviously love this man.**

They believe that Jesus can change him.

We too should be bringing our friends to Jesus through evangelism and prayer.

They remove the roof! (I wonder what Peter's family thought of this?).

The guys pulled back the straw and mud, made a hole and lowered the man in the presence of Jesus. **Don't do this at a growth group!**

Imagine the guy being lowered (demonstrate)... That's letting your request be known to God...

V.5: Jesus saw “**their faith.**” The reference is definitely to the four men, but might have also included the paralyzed man.

Jesus announces, “**Son, your sins are forgiven.**”

This is somewhat **surprising** since you would think Jesus would just say, “Son, stand up, your faith has made you well.” But Jesus goes deeper, to the issue of forgiveness.

It has led some to wonder if sin was the reason this man was a paralytic. We can't know for sure.

We know in Scripture sin is not always the reason for a particular physical problem, but sometimes it is.

It's possible Jesus saw the faith of this man – notice in verse 8, Jesus perceives what's in the heart.

But what you should notice right now, is that your greatest need is not physical.

Your greatest need is having your sins forgiven.

Your greatest need is not getting date; or a job, or a diploma – all find and good – but these aren't your greatest needs.

Jesus' Critics (6-7)

Vs. 6-7: The Scribes charge Jesus with what he will eventually be charged with at the end of his life: **blasphemy**. The charge him with this because they know **only God can forgive sins**.

They were **actually right!** They were only misguided in their assessment.

Notice, “**this fellow**” or “**this man**.”

The Pharisees *missed the hour of visitation*.

The physician who heals souls was there and they rejected him.

Jesus' Response to the Critics (8-11)

V. 8b: “Why do you question these things in your hearts?”

Amazingly, Jesus perceives what is in their hearts (“within themselves”).

Jesus knows what is within us.

V. 9: “Which is easier to say?...” We would think, “It's easier to say something that is invisible, forgiveness, then make someone physically well.” But no. **Jesus is more than a miracle worker**.

Others were miracle workers in the OT. But none of them could pronounce final forgiveness; that was only God alone. Only God could send away sins! Some didn't even believe the Messiah would forgive sins...

V. 10: Jesus says that he has “the authority to forgive sins.” This is a clear statement of deity.

Some skeptics – like Ehrman – try to argue that there are no claims of deity in Mark's gospel. And after Mark, the other gospel writers inserted deified parts. Not true! His deity is everywhere in Mark's gospel!

“Son of Man.” Jesus' favorite self-designation (cf., Dan 7:13-14). 81 times in the gospels. Son of Man allowed him to explain the entire scope of his messianic ministry without all the political overtones (Akin).

V. 11: Look at this scene. **He came lying on a mat; he left carrying the mat!**

Can you imagine the expression of those at his home?

Why did Jesus do the physical healing since the bigger need was forgiveness?

To say, "I'll do the healing to show I can do the forgiving."

To provide a picture of the kingdom of God.

Isaiah said that when Messiah comes, "Then the lame will leap like a deer" (35:6)

To provide a picture of God's mercy/compassion

The Response of the People (12)

The **Paralytic**: "Immediately" – Jesus changes us instantly

The **People**: Amazement & Glory to God. **Psalm 103:1-3** would have been appropriate!

The **Religious Leaders**: They hate it! They went away critical, anger, self-righteous...

"What did you think of his Hebrew?"

"Well, he wasn't dressed very nice."

"I heard he had a tattoo that said King of Kings."

"I think he was spotted at Subway eating a ham sandwich."

These were the professors, the scholars, the skeptics of Jesus.

You can think about modern examples of people who "question in their hearts" – Muslims (Jesus was a miracle worker, but can't forgive sins – that's blasphemy), New Atheists (it's all make belie

Meanwhile the paralyed guy is partying! I imagine him dancing, running, walking, entering a 5 K.

Application:

A: Come to Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins.

*Listen, you are not going to find another religion that forgives your sins. It's about obeying someone's **ridiculous list of rules** in effort of earning God's love.*

And that greatest need is met **immediately** if one responds in repentance and faith in Christ.

Our sin is against God, and only God can forgive them. Even though David sinned against Bathsheba, he ultimately sinned against God, "Against you and you only have I sinned."

And he forgives! In Christ, we are clean!

How did he forgive – on the cross. He traded places with us.

What did he forgive – Not generic sins, but every sin you committed.

Illustration: **Song**

You are not hiding your sin; Jesus knows the heart. So come clean.

B: Imitate Jesus by forgiving others

Jesus has canceled our greatest debt, and that is fuel for us to forgive others of minor offenses compared to this one. This is not easy, but it's the path of a disciple. **Example: Funeral Service, Michael publically told the man who killed his wife in a car accident – a man who was reckless – he said, “We forgive you.” It ministered to me so deeply because I was so angry sitting in that funeral. Who can do this? Only those who know the grace of Jesus.**

#2: Controversy Over Friendship (2:13-17)

Jesus was separated from sin, but not isolated from sinners. He befriended them and changed them.

In this story of the tax collector, we see the grace of Jesus. This is a "scandal of grace."

Jesus is out among people – as a model missionary.

“Jesus come teach at our Christmas service. There will be candles and soft music. Why are you going to preach to that group of high school students on the corner?... You’re going to frat house? You went to a bowling alley to talk to guys?”

We don't know if this was Matthew, but he certainly appears to be based on Matthew's Gospel.

"Matthew's name means “gift of God.” The one who had been a thief will now receive a gift from God and become a gift of God to the people he had taken advantage of. What a transformation!" -Akin

13: Beside the sea – most of the sea narratives are a call to discipleship.

14: Levi's Call

“Follow me.” The same thing said to the four fishermen.

Jesus called four fishermen, *and the one who taxed them!* What a picture of redemption.

Levi had a lot of money but not a lot of friends. Jesus calls him to join this group. Jesus comes to seek and save the lost. Levi fit that bill.

He was a despised man. That's because he took up taxes for the Roman oppressors. They were notorious for taking additional money as well. He was there in Capernaum taking up taxes, and surely fish was one of the commodities that were taxed. He was like a mafia-leader.

Example: Ray in NY, “forget about it” – invite had a former mafia leader into his worship service to share his testimony, and the place was full. He said one of the visitors was using a name “Mendez.” Ray said, “He didn’t look like no Mendez” – turned out he was Italian not Spanish. Mendez came up after the sermon for prayer, but asked Ray, “Hey Pastor, “You’re not wearing a wire are you?”

Jesus calls guys like this. And Levi follows him...

15: What Prompts the Controversy

After he follows Jesus, he invites his friends to a social gathering at his home to meet Jesus.

Note **Luke 5:29**.

The context implies that Levi arranged a banquet to celebrate his call to discipleship.” (Guelich).

Jesus is at a banquet, a dinner, a party, with some controversial figures.

Table Fellowship

In the ancient Near East, to have a fellowship meal with someone meant that you accepted them in your company. It was a **boundary marker**.

It was more than just nourishment. It symbolized friendship, intimacy and unity.

Here the basis for such acceptance appears to be forgiveness.” (Witherington)

Levi is saying “What brings us all together, is that we are great sinners, but Christ is a great Savior” to quote John Newton.

“Among the Jews (in particular) it was an unheard-of thing for a rabbi or any other religious leader to lower himself by staying at the house of a

‘publican.’” (Geldenhuys).

This story reminds us of Zacchaeus. Jesus went to his home...

This group is not the ritually unclean, the poor, downtrodden. Jesus is with the socially immoral.

It’s a banquet with those who were **bad to the bone**. It’s a scandal. **It’s scandalous grace.**

16: The Critics’ Question

“Why does he eat with sinners and tax collectors?”

How could Jesus, a godly man, eat with **mafia leaders**, harlots, cheats, swindlers, and others?

17: Jesus responds to the critics.

A: “I came for the sick, not the well” – See Matthew 9, “Go learn what this means....”

B: “I came to call the sinners not the righteous”

I take both to mean, “the **so-called well**” or the “so-called righteous,” “the **self-righteous.**” The group that was questioning him.

“call” – it is a summons to repentance (cf., Matt).

Notice that they did not repent before he had a meal with them.

He fellowshiped with them, befriended them, and then called them to repentance.

We like to reverse this in the church culture.

We only eat with the upright.

He didn’t require repentance in advance before spending time with sinners and tax collectors, and neither should we.

Another Meal

I think the meal of Jesus with people is also a foreshadowing of the **not yet dimension of the kingdom of God.** Just as the healings are **previews** of the coming healing in the new heavens and earth; there will be a **better banquet with sinners who have repented from every tribe and tongue.** (Matt 8:11-12; Luke 13:29; Isa. 25:6; Rev 19).

When you have a barbecue and invite people over to show them grace, and help them meet Jesus, you are acting out the values of the kingdom.

Our parents (Genesis) ate of forbidden fruit and caused separation, Jesus has come to reconcile us to God, where we can eat and drink with him in the new garden.

Applications:

A: Levi’s calling reminds us that Jesus can change anyone. Look who he starts with!

“When Jesus eats with Levi, the message is clear: Jesus has come for losers, people in the margins, people who’ve made a mess of their lives, people who are ordinary. Jesus has come for you. The only people left out are those who think they don’t need God: the self-righteous and the self-important. Sadly, that includes many people.” (Chester).

Maybe “mafia” doesn’t rightly impact you. Imagine a guy who owns a pornography business. How disgusting. How depraved. But he meets Jesus, and is transformed! Jesus can change anyone.

B. Levi’s banquet reminds us of the need to practice gospel hospitality.

Meals are powerful. They turn strangers into friends.

They represent friendship, community and welcome.

Categories:

Neighborliness – serving the common good of a community

Fellowship with Christians – building up one another

Mercy Ministry – Providing necessities and protection to the poor and vulnerable

Evangelism – Reaching out to outsiders

Following the controversial Christ will often make you the subject of religious onlookers – as you seek to imitate Jesus. Get out of your comfort zone, and follow Jesus. Find your Levi.

Question: Would you pray that God would use you to lead a friend to Jesus this year? I mean, let's live this! For real, let's pause and pray before moving on.

#3: Controversy Over Fasting (2:18-20)

In this next controversy, Jesus blows everything up for the religious leaders.

After noting Levi's party with Jesus, the religious leaders grumbling concerns fasting.

The Day of Atonement was the only fast mentioned in the New Testament (Acts 27:9), and it was the only fast mandated in the OT (Akin). There were other fasts in the OT, but only this one was mandated.

Jesus was not opposed to fasting. He assumed his disciples would fast (see Matt 6:16).

So Jesus' answer is interesting here.

V. 18: The Pharisees and John's disciples were **fasting**, but not Jesus' disciples. Why?

Jesus was actually more like the Pharisees than the other religious groups. They had some good intentions. They wanted the law applied. And this was the rub. The controversy normally had to do **oral tradition**. The Pharisees elevated their traditions above the intent of the law, and went beyond the laws themselves. Like the Pharisees, Jesus took the law seriously, but they were amiss.

Three pillars to Jewish Piety: Fasting, Almsgiving, and Prayer. (cf., Lk 18:12, pharisees fasted twice per week)

Jesus' disciples were ignoring one of those three pillars.

Why?

V 19: You don't fast when Jesus is with you in the flesh! He's **the bridegroom! He's here! It's not a time for fasting, but feasting!**

In the OT, the *Bridegroom* was the Lord, Yahweh (Isa 62:5). This is another claim of deity.

Jesus' presence isn't a time of sorrow but a time of celebration – like a wedding!

A wedding isn't a time to afflict yourself!

Imagine a wedding invitation that was dark, somber, with tombstones... They normally say, "Please join us in a time of joyful celebration...." They don't say, "Please join us in a spirit of contrition and brokenness as a new son in law enters our family" (KD) ... Maybe the Bride's dad likes the idea of a fast!

Weddings in Jesus' day were times of great celebration. You would celebrate for a week ordinarily.

A relationship with Jesus is not somber and boring; it's joyful. Jesus Christ has wed himself to a sinful bride - this too is scandalous grace!

V. 20: The Bridegroom will be taken away.

A picture of a the groom being forceably taken away

This is a picture of the cross (Isa 53:8).

Then we fast.

Then we fast, with longing for Jesus' presence.

Realize that fasting for us must always **be focused on Jesus, not what we want God to give us.**

All sorts of religions fast, but Christian fasting is Christ-centered.

It's focused on the presence of the groom, and includes a longing for the groom.

Remember **Mark's audience again: Suffering Roman Christians. How encouraging and instructive would this have been? They would have watched family members being "taken away." Jesus identifies with the suffering saints. And he says, your fasting and prayer should include a longing for the Groom to come and bring shalom, to come for His bride.**

Two Parables that Explain the Broader Significance of Jesus' Ministry (2:21-22)

The same point is made in both examples: Jesus is saying, “I can’t simply be an add-on of the religion of the day.”

The Old Mosaic regulations and extrabiblical standards of the religious leaders must give way to Christ.

Jesus is ushering in a new era, with new ways, a whole new worldview.

A New Patch (21)

Trying to simply add Jesus on to your religion – without giving up certain customs/shadows for the reality of Jesus, is like trying to add a new patch to an old garment. The hole will just get larger when the new cloth gets wet and then shrinks.

Heb 10:1 – the real thing has arrived, don’t continue worshipping the shadow.

New Wine (22)

The wineskin was kind of shaped like a catneen, but malleable. After a while, the wineskins would get old and brittle . They were often made of goat skin. If you put new wine into the skins, after fermentation, the old wine skins will burst.

It’s Bad idea.

Jesus is the new wine, and you need a new receptacle!

Will they be rid of the shadow, and receive the substance.

Will the disciples become new receptacles for the expanding fermentation of Jesus in their lives? Or will they just try to fit him into an old religion?

Conclusion

Jesus ushered in something new.

He ushered in something glorious.

He came to bring forgiveness.

He came to call sinful people to repentance, that they may follow him

He came for a sinful bride.

He came to bring the wine.

Come to Jesus and you not only get forgiveness – but you get *a joy* that this world doesn’t understand. But you’re going to have to leave that old wineskin of religion behind, and become a whole new receptacle. Then receive this Savior. Receive this joy.

The Psalmist said, “You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their wine and grain abound” (Ps 4:7).

In Christ, we can know the fullness of joy.

Will you receive Him?

The Forgiver of Sinners

The Friend of Sinners

The Bridegroom for a Sinful Bride