

Mark 1:40-2:28

Introduction

1. Sometimes when we read the gospels we can get overly caught in a micro view – seeing each story as discreet in itself and revelatory of some aspect or characteristic of Jesus and/or his ministry. While this close examination can provide insights, it is also important to take a macro view at times to see the larger picture that the author is showing us. In the macro view, larger patterns are often revealed, and broader truths/understandings of Jesus' ministry come to light.
2. Mark here locates a third story of healing (1:40-45) and then a fourth (2:1-12) in anticipation of the controversy section that follows (2:13-3:6), where Jesus will repeatedly be charged with violating the Law. In this case, while Jesus violates custom and expectations by touching the unclean man, he explicitly affirms the Mosaic Law by sending the man to the priest for certification that he had been cleansed and could reenter normal society.
3. The pattern that we are given thus far is: “walk by the sea/call story/four healing stories” followed by “walk by the sea/call story/four controversy stories.” What larger theme might Mark be trying to alert us to with this pattern? What do these stories tell us about Jesus and how he will be received in his ministry?

Questions for Discussion

1. **What is the connecting theme in all the healing stories of Mark 1 and 2?** *The healings indicate whom God will forgive and under what conditions. The old ways of understanding and doing things do not limit God's love or healing power. Healing bridges the divide of separation from God and community, enabling wholeness and full participation on the part of those who are healed.*
2. **Discuss what Mark means when he speaks of “sin or sinners.”** *It is the classic definition, “to miss the mark.” Jesus never speaks of sin and its nature and consequences. But he is aware of its reality, and he is conscious of being a Victor over sin. For Mark, sin is the gulf between humanity and God. Jesus, by drawing others into his family, overcomes that gulf.*
3. **Does Jesus initiate healings? What does the way healings happen suggest?** *It is the faith of each approaching group or person that initiates healing. This demonstrates the quality of their “faith soil.” Healing is a two-way street; not something that Jesus can do by himself.*
4. **When Jesus sees the faith of the friends who bring in the paralyzed man, he heals him. What characteristics of “faith” are revealed by this story?** *Faith is perseverance, not being overcome by fear in the face of obstacles, willingness to step forward at any cost.*

5. Why did the scribes get so upset about what Jesus says in 2:5, “Son, your sins are forgiven”? *There are a couple things happening here. First, by saying it this way Jesus dispels the ancient belief that physical ailments were a direct result of one’s sins. In a similar way, Jesus’ later comments to the rich man about eternal life attacks the common belief that having wealth is a sign of God’s blessings. Second, in Jesus’ comments Mark shows his authority because what Jesus says comes to pass. The Pharisees are upset because there are rules and guidelines for how these things are done. Jesus is not “licensed” to speak like this.*

6. How is Levi’s call different than Peter and Andrew’s in Chapter 1? Is there a difference between being a follower and a disciple? *This is the only mention of Levi in Mark. Often assumed that Levi=Matthew, but it’s not clear. Jesus uses words “follow me,” when he calls Levi. But he says, “Come after/behind me” when he calls Peter and Andrew. Levi is not said to have “left everything behind” either. Plus, when describing the scene at Levi’s house, a distinction is made between the “tax collectors and sinners” who are there and Jesus’ “disciples.”*

7. What is the unspoken issue behind the Pharisee's question in 2:16, “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners”? *It’s actually one of respect for Jesus. The Pharisees see him as an equal – a rabbi. So they are only concerned about why “he” does this, not “they.”*

8. In 2:13-17, the issue is that Jesus eats with tax collectors and sinners. In 2:18-22, it’s that Jesus' disciples do not fast. In 2:23-28, it’s that Jesus' disciples were picking grain on the sabbath. What is the deeper issue behind these three incidents that unifies them? *In each case, the same point is being made – that the distinct needs of human beings in every special moment in time always takes precedence over the established rules, rituals and customs dictated by tradition. This is not an outright rejection of traditional ritual or Law, however. Indeed, fasting is proper when the bridegroom has been taken away, just as old cloth, not new, unshrunk cloth, is the proper material to use in patching old garments. Fasting is not appropriate, however, when the bridegroom is still with the guests, just as new wineskins, not old ones, are necessary for new wine. Traditional rituals are suitable for traditional situations, but new situations require new responses.*

9. Mark shows us that Jesus’ words effect change (they create healing, forgiveness, reconnection). But who is not changed? *The scribes are offended by Jesus’ performance teaching. Jesus’ words hold the power for healing only for those who come seeking it from him.*

10. How successful is Jesus in putting the kibosh on people spreading the word about him? *He is wholly unsuccessful: “his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee.” (1:28) Why do you think Jesus wants to keep the lid on things so badly?* *To answer this question, think about what the effect of insisting on silence has on the characters in the story. Then think about what effect it has on YOU, the reader. Ultimately, it creates a tension in the story, and in the reader. Mark is keeping us engaged, and is shaping us to respond to his story in a particular way.*