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Mark 2—3:6

—— Popularity and Controversy

As news spreads of Jesus' authoritative preaching and his ability to heal diseases and cast out demons, many people flock to him. Religious leaders begin to scrutinize his words and actions with increasing hostility. Look carefully at how Jesus handles their questions.

Read Mark 2:1-12

1. Imagine you are making a video of this incident. Describe the setting and the characters.

As the scene opens, what is going on?

Note: Jesus had taught in the synagogue and healed many people during a previous visit in Capernaum (1:21-33).

2. What indicates Jesus' popularity at this time?

3. Why and how is Jesus' preaching interrupted?

How does he react to this interruption?

4. What do you think the paralyzed man's friends have in mind?

How does that compare with what Jesus says in verse 5?

5. How do the scribes or teachers of the law react to this statement and why? Look up *blasphemy* in a dictionary.

Note: Under Jewish law, blasphemy was punishable by death.

6. In your own words what are the scribes thinking?

What is the point of the question Jesus asks in reply (verse 9)?

7. What do you think Jesus expects to prove to the scribes by healing the paralyzed man?

8. How does the healed man express his faith?

How do the people react to his healing?

Read Mark 2:13-17

9. Jesus chooses a tax collector to join the four fishermen even though tax collectors were despised as thieves and collaborators with Rome. At Levi's dinner party:
- who complains
 - to whom
 - about what
10. In response to their complaint, what claim does Jesus make about himself?

What is he saying about the Pharisees?

Note: The Pharisees were a religious party respected for their piety who stressed strict observance of the law and the many meticulous regulations that had been added to it.

Read Mark 2:18-22

11. Some people question Jesus as to why his disciples are not fasting. In answering them Jesus refers to himself and his disciples as a bridegroom and his guests. What do you learn about his ministry from this description? Since one purpose of fasting can be to bring us closer to God, why do Jesus' disciples not need to fast for a while?

When will it be appropriate for his disciples to fast?

Note: In that time, wedding guests were exempt from all fasting during the week-long festivities of a wedding celebration.

12. What is the **old** practice that people are discussing?

How do Jesus' illustrations (of what happens when the **new** is put into the **old**) answer the question about his disciples not fasting (verses 21-22)?

What is the **new**?

Read Mark 2:23-28

13. What new complaint do the Pharisees make to Jesus about his disciples?
14. How does Jesus use an Old Testament story to answer their complaint?

What different purposes do Jesus and the Pharisees see for the Sabbath?

*Note: **Son of Man** is the name Jesus uses in referring to himself. See Mark 2:10. At this time more than a thousand manmade rules and regulations made the Sabbath a terrible burden instead of a physical and spiritual benefit.*

Read Mark 3:1-6

15. What change do you observe in those who oppose Jesus?
16. What do you learn about Jesus from this confrontation in the synagogue?
17. What are the results of this healing for the man and for Jesus?

Note: The Herodians were a Jewish party that favored the Herodian dynasty and had a political goal of keeping peace by appeasing Rome. The Pharisees (see note on page 23) and Herodians normally would have nothing to do with each other.

SUMMARY

1. How and why does the degree of opposition to Jesus increase through each of these five sections of Scripture?

Who opposes Jesus today, and why?

2. Consider what happens to the paralyzed man, to Levi, and to the man with the withered hand when they meet Jesus.

Why is their experience so different from that of the Pharisees?

CONCLUSION

Some people react negatively to what Jesus says and does. His claims of authority and his lack of conformity to the religious status quo disturb the religious leaders of his day. Early in Jesus' ministry they plot to destroy him.