



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



# The Holy Gospel According to St. Mark

## Chapter 2

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# Introduction

- Chapter two marks a turning point in Jesus' ministry
- Up to this point, Jesus has been traveling throughout the Galilee
- He has been preaching the "good news" of the Kingdom, He has been healing people of their spiritual and physical illnesses, and He has been casting out demons according to the prophecies of the prophets
- Multitudes of hopeful people have been coming to be healed and to hear Him preach



# Introduction

- But, beginning with His healing of the paralytic at Capernaum, the religious authorities start to raise objections to Jesus as He encounters their disapproval and suspicion
- Pharisees raise objections to Jesus' teachings, His actions and the actions of His disciples that are contrary to their interpretation of doctrine and ritual observances





# Introduction

- It includes four negative questions, intended to raise doubts about the Lord's authority, His behavior, His rites of worshipping, and His obedience of the Law
  - A- *“Why does this man speak blasphemies like this? 2:7*
  - B- *“How is it that He eats and drinks with tax-collectors and sinners?” 2:16*
  - C- *“Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?” 2:18*
  - D- *“Why do they do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?” 2:24*



# Introduction

- These questions were presented, yet those who asked did not wait for answers
- Their intention was just to attack the Lord Jesus Christ
- His supreme acts of love were not rewarded with thanks and love, but with insults and false accusations
- Despite that, the Master did not forsake His love or refrain from laying down His life, even for the sake of His adversaries



# Introduction

## Chapter Outline:

- Jesus Forgives and Heals a Paralytic 2:1-12
- Matthew the Tax Collector 2:13-17
- Jesus Is Questioned About Fasting 2:18-22
- Jesus Is Lord of the Sabbath 2:23-28



# Jesus Forgives and Heals a Paralytic 2:1-12



- St. Mark alone names Capernaum, St. Matthew describing it as “His own city”
- After having been in desert places for some time, Jesus returned privately to Capernaum
- It was rumored that He was in the house
- Many scholars believe it was St. Peter’s house
- The rumor immediately spread, that He was come to the city
- And straightway many were gathered together

# Jesus Forgives and Heals a Paralytic 2:1-12



- His arrival was sooner known that such a multitude was gathered together that the house could not contain them; nor even the court before the door
- This crowd came, not to flatter Him, or to get social or material gain, but to receive the word, that proceeded from His mouth to satisfy their depths, and to heal their inner wounds
- Jesus preached the Gospel, the word of grace and truth, of life and salvation



# Jesus Forgives and Heals a Paralytic 2:1-12



- Four men, one at each corner of couch on which he lay
- The number of the bearers is given by St. Mark only
- This sick man appears to have been too feeble to come himself, and too weak to be carried in any other way
- The houses at that time were generally made flat-roofed
- They are also furnished with battlements round about, Deuteronomy 22:8; to prevent persons from falling off; and have a trap door by which they descend into the house

# Jesus Forgives and Heals a Paralytic 2:1-12



- This door, it appears, was too narrow to let down the sick man and his couch; so they uncovered the roof, removed a part of the tiles; and having broken it up, taken away the frames or lumber, to which the tiles had been attached, they then had room to let down the afflicted man
- *the bed*, The word signifies the poorest kind of bed
- These four men refer to the Church as a whole
- Three are the orders of the clergy (bishops, priests and deacons) and congregation
- All are bound to work together with one spirit, in order to bring forward every paralytic soul to Lord Christ

# Jesus Forgives and Heals a Paralytic 2:1-12



- Jesus was impressed with the paralyzed friends because they were so determined to get Jesus' help for their friend that they removed the roof 's house to lower his mat down into the room where Jesus was staying
- They had faith that Jesus could heal their friend
- Some scholars believe, if the sick man was healed because of faith of the four men who brought him, that the paralytic demonstrated his faith, by his consent to be carried and lowered from the roof
- Although it was a rather weak and negative faith



# Jesus Forgives and Heals a Paralytic 2:1-12



- Our Lord is moved to show mercy to sinners, by the faith and desires, and prayers of others; for this man was not more helpless in his limbs, than in his soul
- *Son*, Literally, "child" The Hebrews used the words "son" and "child" with a great latitude of signification
- From this example, we are taught that in sickness the sacraments and helps of the Church, which are the medicines of the soul, should be called for in the first instance; for Christ first healed the sick man's soul, before he removed his bodily infirmity
- We also learn that many diseases originate in sin, and that we are to remove the effect by removing the cause

# Jesus Forgives and Heals a Paralytic 2:1-12



- The Scribes should have rejoiced, to see the paralytic enjoy the grace of remission of his sins and healing of his soul
- Yet, having been shelled within their ego, saw in what the Lord said, a blasphemy and an escape from healing the body
- They believed Jesus has assumed God's divine sovereign power by declaring the man's sins are forgiven
- The scribes were the highly educated people of that time
- And their learning, because not used in dependence on God, rendered them proud, envious, and stubborn

# Jesus Forgives and Heals a Paralytic 2:1-12



- Unsanctified knowledge has still the same effect
- That light serves only to blind and lead men out of the way which is not joined with uprightness of heart
- The most sacred truths often become an occasion of delusion, where men are under the government of their evil passions



# Jesus Forgives and Heals a Paralytic 2:1-12



- Jesus with His infinite love desired to heal their souls with that of the paralytic
- So He clarified two things
- First, that He knew their thoughts
- In telling them what the thoughts of their hearts were, (for they had expressed nothing publicly), He gave them the fullest proof of His power to forgive sins
- Because only God can forgive sins, and only God can search and know the heart

# Jesus Forgives and Heals a Paralytic 2:1-12



- Jesus pronounced the man's sins forgiven; and gave the scribes the fullest proof of His power to do so, by telling them what, in the secret of their souls, they thought on the subject
- Secondly, to correct their belief that healing the body is more difficult than healing the soul
- That is why, by healing the visible body, He proved that He is capable of healing the soul and forgiving sins, which are much more difficult

# Jesus Forgives and Heals a Paralytic 2:1-12



- St. John Chrysostom says, “He confused them with their very words; as though He was saying to them: ‘You proclaimed that forgiveness of sins is for God alone; Therefore, you can no longer question my identity.’”



# Jesus Forgives and Heals a Paralytic 2:1-12



- External miracles are the proofs of internal ones
- Three miracles are wrought in this case
  1. The remission of the poor man's sins
  2. The discernment of the secret thoughts of the scribes
  3. The restoring of the paralytic, in an instant, to perfect soundness
- *the Son of Man*, This is the first time this title occurs in St. Mark, where we find it 14 times

# Jesus Forgives and Heals a Paralytic 2:1-12



- This title is never applied by the writers of the Gospels themselves to the Eternal Son of God
- Whenever it occurs, it is so applied by our Lord, and no other
- There are only three exceptions to this rule, (1) where the title is used by Stephen, Acts 7:56, and (2) by St. John, Revelation 1:13; Revelation 14:14
- *Immediately he arose*, Power going along with the words of Christ, the paralyzed man found himself perfectly well; and at once jumped up from off his bed

# Jesus Forgives and Heals a Paralytic 2:1-12



- *took up his bed*, upon his shoulders, with all the ease imaginable
- *in the presence of them all*, The Scribes and Pharisees, and the whole multitude of the people, who were eyewitnesses of this wonderful cure
- We are not informed of the effect of this miracle upon the scribes and Pharisees
- But it is too evident that, though they could not deny the fact, they would not acknowledge the power; while the mass of the people, more free from prejudice, and therefore more open to conviction, united in giving glory to God



# Jesus Forgives and Heals a Paralytic 2:1-12



- St. Augustine sees in that bed a symbol of the weaknesses of the body
- In our sins, we were taken over by the lusts of the body and its weaknesses, with our souls bound and banned from movement
- But, as we gain the strength of the new life, the soul sustains the body with all its sensations and energies, to guide it by the spirit, and take it home, that is to the holy life
- Thus, the body is not longer a burden that destroys the soul, but helper that responds to it, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit

# Matthew the Tax Collector 2:13-17



- Fr. Theophlactius sees that Lord Christ went out by the sea forsaking and discarding glory
- Yet, wherever He went the multitude gathered around Him and He was glorified in them
- The publican (tax official) named Levi in this passage and in Luke 5:27-28, is called "Matthew," his Greek name, in the same encounter with Christ in Matthew 9:9

# Matthew the Tax Collector

## 2:13-17



- He is also called Matthew in all the lists of the twelve Apostles, Matthew 10:3 where he is identified as a tax-collector and in Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15 and Acts 1:13
- It was common for the Romans to assign educated men to the task of collecting Roman taxes
- St. Matthew, as was the duty of all tax collectors, was sitting at his customs post as Jesus passed by



# Matthew the Tax Collector 2:13-17



- Like the other Apostles called by Jesus to "Follow me," St. Matthew left his profession and his comfortable life to follow Jesus
- By calling a publican, Jesus shocked 'public opinion and outraged appropriateness, as the Pharisees and scribes understood it
- But He touched the hearts of the outcasts
- With God, through Christ, there is mercy to pardon the greatest sins, and grace to change the greatest sinners, and make them holy

# Matthew the Tax Collector

## 2:13-17



- It appears, from Luke 5:29, that he made a great feast on the occasion, thus testifying his gratitude for the honor done him; and that his friends and acquaintances might profit by the teaching of his new Master, he invites them to the banquet that was honored by the presence of Christ
- His companions, it appears, were not of the most creditable kind
- They were tax-gatherers and sinners

# Matthew the Tax Collector

## 2:13-17



- There is no doubt that our Savior, in the early part of His ministry, was extremely popular
- Multitudes of the common people attended Him, and gave definite evidence that they were His real disciples
- Tax collectors were ranked with sinners because they were suspected of overcharging the taxes collected from the common people for the hated Romans



# Matthew the Tax Collector

## 2:13-17



- The Scribes and Pharisees were offended at His eating and drinking because He did eat with publicans and sinners; men of very infamous characters, and bad lives, with whom the Pharisees disdained to keep company
- They protested against His conduct, assuming that it constituted a violation of the Law as it was unfit for the clean hands to eat together with the unclean ones
- Jesus heard their murmurings
- As the physician is not infected by the disease of the patient, but rather overcomes it and drives it from him, so it is no disgrace but rather an honor to the physician to associate himself with the sick, and so much the more, the greater the sickness

# Matthew the Tax Collector

## 2:13-17



- So that it is as though Jesus Christ said, "I who am sent from heaven by the Father, that I might be the Physician of the souls of sinners, am not defiled by their sins and spiritual diseases when I converse with them; but rather I cure and heal them, which is alike for my glory and for their good, and so much the more, the greater their sins. For I am the physician of sinners, not their companion. But you, scribes and Pharisees, are not the physicians but the companions of sinners, and so you are contaminated. Nevertheless, you desire to be thought righteous and holy; and therefore I do not associate with you."

# Jesus Is Questioned About Fasting 2:18-22



- Probably some of John's disciples felt a little jealousy when they saw their teacher an example in severe asceticism in his food, drink, and attire, bow before the Lord and persuades his own disciples to follow Him
- The Lord Jesus Christ was not in their sight, an ascetic, for He did not instruct His disciples to fast the way they did!
- As for the disciples of the Pharisees, they were full of envy because they watched how their teachers broke down before the Master; and how the multitude deserted them, in spite of their high spiritual status and their strict rites of fasting



# Jesus Is Questioned About Fasting 2:18-22



- The Lord did not criticize the disciples of John nor those of the Pharisees
- Instead, He turned the situation to reveal new spiritual Theological concepts, that touches the life of men as a whole
- St. Cyril the Great observes that when the Pharisees could not oppose the Master directly, they attacked Him through His disciples, who were not fasting
- They did not comprehend that their own fasting was only apparent, that their hearts were full of evil, while the Master's disciples were practicing the inner fasting of the heart until they fast by the flesh in due time

# Jesus Is Questioned About Fasting 2:18-22



- The bridal metaphor is used in Old Testament Scripture to express the loving covenant relationship between God and His covenant people, Isaiah 54:5; Ezekiel 16:6-14; Jeremiah 3:20; Hosea 2:4-7, 20
- Now Jesus uses the same imagery when He answers their question with a rhetorical question
- It is a strategy He will often use to bring His listeners to a deeper understanding
- He also reveals something new about His identity

# Jesus Is Questioned About Fasting 2:18-22



- Who is the "bridegroom" and who are the "wedding guests" in the short parable?
- Jesus is the bridegroom and the wedding guests are those who have come to embrace His Gospel message of salvation, like those men at the banquet He attended
- Jesus' point is that mourning rituals are not appropriate to a joyful wedding celebration
- Jesus is comparing a joyful wedding celebration to the joy of God the Son's visitation to mankind



# Jesus Is Questioned About Fasting 2:18-22



- Jesus had proclaimed that His disciples would fast when the Bridegroom was taken away from them
- When they do, so that would be with a new concept worthy of the New Covenant
- Thus, after His Ascension, the Holy Spirit descended upon them and transformed each into a new garment or a new wineskin; that carries the new nature in the image of their Creator and practices worship with a new mind

# Jesus Is Questioned About Fasting 2:18-22



- Thus, the fast of the Old Covenant, a deprivation of the body became in the New Covenant, the liberation of the soul and refreshment of the inner heart
- The Lord did not want His disciples to practice fasting in its new concept while they were still 'old garment' or 'old wineskin.'
- But, with the renewal of their lives through His Ascension and the pouring of His Holy Spirit upon them, they would be able to practice fasting with a new and fit Christian mind

# Jesus Is Questioned About Fasting 2:18-22



- St. Cyril the Great says: “The hearts of the Jews have been old wineskins that do not accept new wine. But Christ opens widely the gates of the Christian lent to be exalted with spiritual blessings and adored with various virtues.”
- It may also be a comparison between the Old and New Covenants
- The Old Covenant was good for its time
- It was a tutor and a guide for the children of God, and it was the first stage of revealed Law, but it had to make way for the New because it could not provide the path to eternal salvation nor could it give the gift of God the Holy Spirit



# Jesus Is Lord of the Sabbath

## 2:23-28



- After presenting the new depths for the Law, and setting our minds beyond the letter to enjoy the constructive, life-giving Spirit, the Lord Jesus Christ was accused by the Jews as a breaker of the Law, especially concerning the sanctification of the Sabbath
- The Law allowed man to eat from any grain field, as long as he did not take anything with him
- Yet the Pharisees saw in what the disciples did, a practice of harvesting on the Sabbath, which is against the Law

# Jesus Is Lord of the Sabbath

## 2:23-28



- Jesus Christ with a gentle irony He adopts one of the favorite formulas of their own Rabbis, and inquires if they had never read what David their favorite hero had done when flying from Saul
- He went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the showbread, which only the priests were allowed to eat, and also gave some to those who were with him
- He also took the sword of Goliath that was presented to the Lord, 1 Samuel 21
- Jesus Christ's point is that the incident with David set the precedent that when mercy is a necessity it outweighs the letter of the Law

# Jesus Is Lord of the Sabbath

## 2:23-28



- St. Mark mentioned 'Abiathar' as the name of the high priest while it was 'Abimalech' in the book of Samuel
- Some scholars believe that 'Abiathar' was the son of 'Abimalech,' and that they were together as they encountered the prophet David
- When the father was killed by Saul, Abiathar fled to David and became his companion during his escape; to become, later on, a high priest, of a far greater fame than his father's



# Jesus Is Lord of the Sabbath 2:23-28



- In His response Jesus Christ did not defend His action and those of His disciples, that they did not break the Sabbath, but strongly proclaimed His authority
- He confirmed to them that He is the Lord of the Sabbath, and the Maker of the Law
- He made the Law not to master man, but to serve him
- If He, the Son of God, became the Son of Man for the sake of man, would He not put the Sabbath at the service of man?!

# Jesus Is Lord of the Sabbath

## 2:23-28



- Jesus Christ is not revoking or rejecting the Sabbath laws of the covenant; rather He is asserting the authority that belongs to God in the interpretation of the Sabbath laws since He is the author of the Sabbath, another reference to His divinity
- Jesus Christ is again revealing His identity as the divine Messiah who has the authority to interpret the Law, even the Law associated with keeping the Sabbath



# Discussion

- This chapter outlines four controversies between the Pharisees and Jesus. What were they?
- Who are the Pharisees? How does understanding the background of the Pharisees' quest for personal holiness cast the clashes between them and Jesus in a whole new light? What were the Pharisees trying to accomplish as opposed to what Jesus Christ was trying to accomplish? In the end, if Jesus Christ's conflicts with the Pharisees had little to do with disagreements over the Law, what did it have to do with?





# Discussion

- Why is it inappropriate for Jesus Christ's disciples to fast when the bridegroom is among them?
- Jesus Christ responds to the faith of the paralytic's friends by forgiving the sick man's sins. As you reflect on your own life, how does sin tend to paralyze you spiritually? How does forgiveness of sin heal that paralysis?
- Jesus Christ has not come to call the righteous but sinners. In your heart of hearts, to which of the two classes do you think you belong? Do you really look on yourself as a sinner or as someone who is good?