

# READ THIS FIRST

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## The Gospel of Mark: The King and His Kingdom

### Note from Pastor Luke Simmons

The mission of Second Mile Church is to “embody Jesus’ mission and message in every place that God sends us.” The Bible refers to the followers of Jesus as his “ambassadors” (2 Cor 5:20) and expects us to faithfully represent him to the world. In order to faithfully live out this mission we must grow intimately familiar with who Jesus is and what he has done. Thus, it makes sense to have our first weekly study focus on the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus, as described in the Gospel of Mark.

Though this series, “The King and His Kingdom,” will not be an exhaustive study of the person of Jesus, we will become thoroughly acquainted with his message, mission, attitude and actions. Not only will we see Jesus in action, but we’ll also get a glimpse of what life looks like in Jesus’ Kingdom. Mark is a fast-paced, hard-hitting, action-packed book and we will spend fourteen weeks examining the highlights of his account.

This study guide, designed for individual study or for use in Community Groups, is intended to help us dive deeper into the Scripture and apply the things we learn. The Bible calls us to “be doers of the word, and not hearers only” (James 1:22). These study guides are designed to help us not just hear the word on Sunday, but put it into practice Monday through Saturday.

My prayer for this series is that God will use it to deepen your love for Jesus. Whether you are just beginning to explore what it would be like to follow Christ or you’ve trusted him for a long time, my hope is that your heart would be delighted by his majesty, power, humility, trustworthiness, sacrifice and victory. Only as we grow satisfied in Jesus will we be able to bring his love and grace to our hurting world.

Because the Tomb is Empty,

Luke Simmons  
Lead Pastor

### The Format

Each study begins with a **key verse** that summarizes the truth found in the entire section. These key verses, if memorized, would allow you to learn the big ideas found in Mark’s Gospel. Then there is an **introduction** to the passage that you can use for review or, if you miss a Sunday, you can track with us wherever we are. Next are some questions for **investigation** (getting into the text) and **implication** (applying these truths to daily life). Each study concludes with a section on **other issues**, which expand on any other issues or questions raised by the passage that we may not take time to cover during the sermon.

### Suggestions for Individuals

- Before you begin, pray that God would open your eyes to see what he is saying in the Bible and give you the spiritual strength to do something about it.
- Work through the study and write out answers to the questions.
- Resist any temptation to skip over the **implication** section. It is important to ponder how the truths apply to your life. Though these questions are sometimes penetrating and difficult, they are designed to help you think seriously about your life.
- Take what opportunities you can to share with others about what you’ve learned and how you’d like your life to change as a result.

### Suggestions for Community Groups

- It is recommended that you study the passage *after* it has been preached. This way you can discuss the issues raised by the sermon as well as the study itself.
- In your time together as a community, focus on the **implications** for your lives individually and as a group. Share with one another how you sense God calling you to change, pray for one another about these things, and invite one another to encourage you and hold you accountable to apply the truth.
- In your time together as a community, use this guide as a launching point for discussion and care for one another. Resist the urge to try to discuss every question or “get through the material.”

### Questions or Comments?

If you have feedback or questions about the series or studies, please feel free to email them to [info@secondmilechurch.com](mailto:info@secondmilechurch.com).

## Week 4

# KINGDOM FRIENDSHIP

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## Mark 2:13-17

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*And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."*  
.....

(Mark 2:17, ESV)

### Introduction

The previous section of Mark demonstrated that Jesus had not only the ability to drive out demons and clean the sick, but also the unique authority to forgive sins (2:5). Immediately following the healing and forgiving of the paralytic, Mark records that Jesus goes straight to one of the most despicable sinners in all of Galilee—Levi the tax collector. It's as though Mark were saying, "Not only can Jesus forgive sinners, but he can forgive the *deepest and darkest* sinners."

Tax collectors were hated by Jews because of their collusion with Rome, who was the occupying force in Israel. Taxation was a painful symbol of Rome's conquest over Israel,<sup>10</sup> and tax collectors had sold out their own nation and linked arms with the Romans. Not only were tax collectors disloyal to Israel, they were also associated with the most corrupt and morally bankrupt crowd, often described with the general term, "sinners."

This passage also highlights the surprising reality that Jesus' mission was to offer healing grace to those who knew they needed it. As Tim Keller writes:

So here is the surprise. The very people that most people think would be the most interested in Christianity—the moral and religious—are *always* the least interested in real Christianity (once it is explained to them). The very people that most people think would be the least interested in Christianity—the big "sinners"—are always the most interested in real Christianity (once it is explained to them).<sup>11</sup>

### Investigation

Read Mark 2:13-17.

1. Jesus command to Levi is, "Follow me." What do you think Jesus meant by this?
2. Mark uses the phrase "tax collectors and sinners" is three times in this brief passage (2:15, 16). What is he trying to communicate with this phrase?
3. Who did Jesus seem more comfortable around—the religious leaders or the people with messed-up, sinful lives? Why?
4. What did Jesus mean by saying, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners"?

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<sup>10</sup> Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1992). 806.

<sup>11</sup> Timothy J. Keller, *The Gospel of Mark Study Guide*, 21-22.

## Implication

5. Though Jesus seemed to feel more comfortable around really sinful people, it seems that many Christians are more comfortable around religious folks who have their lives in order. Why do you think this is? Is it good or bad?
  
6. In this passage, we see Levi beginning his walk with Jesus by hosting a party with his old sinful friends. In our day, it's common for new believers to leave behind their old friendships so that they don't get sucked into those old ways of living. How should a person determine whether to walk away from his or her previous, sinful friendships? What advice would you give to a new Christian who was trying to discern how involved to be with her wild unsaved friends?
  
7. Jesus said, "Those who are well (healthy) have no need of a physician, but those who are sick." Are you healthy or sick? How do you know?
  
8. Who is a "Levi" in your life—somebody who is so wicked and far from God that it seems impossible to imagine God working in him or her? What can you do to bring the physician's care into his or her life?

## Other Issues

### How should Christians view and interact with culture?

In his book, *Radical Reformation: Reaching Out Without Selling Out*, Mark Driscoll describes four errant approaches to interacting with culture, based on four first-century Jewish sects:<sup>12</sup>

#### 1. *Separating from culture like a Pharisee*

The Pharisees were a very zealous and conservative sectarian movement that were highly committed to getting back to the Scriptures and their brand of hard-line old-time religion. They developed a litany of laws to separate themselves from others in an effort to maintain their purity by living in their own isolated culture. They basically believed they were good and clean before God, so they looked down on everyone else and conveniently overlooked their own sins and hypocrisy. We travel this rut whenever we hold a self-righteous and judgmental attitude that sees the sin in others but not in ourselves.

#### 2. *Blending into culture like a Sadducee*

The Sadducees were a more culturally accommodating liberal movement than the Pharisees. Rather than pulling away from the dominant culture, they were happy to syncretize with it. Their compromise was so thorough that they even denied a future resurrection and the existence of angels and demons (Mark 12:18-27; Acts 23:8). We travel this rut today whenever we don't take sin and Scripture seriously. We also travel this rut whenever being approved by a culture becomes more important than being faithful to God.

#### 3. *Ruling over culture like a Zealot*

The Zealots pursued political power in an effort to forward their national and moral agendas by force and authority. They routinely mistook the kingdom of God for their kingdom and sought to usher it in by might. Today this form of Christianity exists in both the religious right and left. It's present wherever people are more interested in sermons about politics than in sermons about sin and repentance, wherever people are more excited about elections than about Easter, wherever more people sign political petitions than sign up to join a Bible study, and wherever people believe that if we simply elect more people like us, the world will be a better place.

#### 4. *Ignoring culture like an Essene*

The Essenes were not concerned with being separated from the culture like the Pharisees, or with cultural relevance like the Sadducees, or with political power like the Zealots. Instead they wanted to personally encounter God in spiritual experiences. To accomplish this, they withdrew from society, denied them-

<sup>12</sup> Mark Driscoll, *The Radical Reformation: Reaching Out Without Selling Out* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2004). 140-142.

selves pleasure, and lived free from distraction in monkish privacy so they could have mystical encounters with God. This form of Christianity exists wherever people seek out spiritual highs like a junkie needing a fix, wandering from church to church and event to event hoping to be touched by God through the latest anointed spiritual leader.

Driscoll writes, “The problem with each of these ruts is that they are ways of seeking godliness as we define it, rather than as God defines it. But the things that those who are stuck in them desire (holiness, cultural relevance, social transformation, spiritual experience) can’t be brought about by legalism, liberalism, legislation, or lunacy; instead they are the natural effects of faith in the powerful gospel and come from God alone.”

### **How do I maintain friendships with non-Christians and still pursue holiness?**

This can be a challenging question, particularly for those believers whose non-Christian past has involved lots of obvious sin that they might feel tempted to return to. It’s important to remember that the goal is to be holy in heart, mind and actions, and still also love your neighbor as yourself and be a faithful ambassador of Christ to those friends who remain stuck in sin. Levi is a great example of this (Mark 2:13-17). He didn’t just abandon his friends, but by having them over to his house, he also had a say in what could and couldn’t happen.

Many new Christians, in a sincere effort to leave their sinful past behind, abandon the mission field that they have the best opportunity to reach. This often results leaves the former group of friends without the gospel witness that they desperately need. On the other hand, many Christians have fallen back into sin because they lacked the spiritual strength and maturity to resist the temptations that came along with their circle of non-Christian friends. It is difficult to determine what to do, and each situation presents unique opportunities and challenges.

Here are some important questions to ask when trying to discern what is best for you to do:

- Is it beneficial to me personally and to the gospel generally (1 Cor. 6:12)?
- Will I lose self-control and be mastered by what I participate in (1 Cor. 6:12)?
- Will I be doing this in the presence of someone who I *know* will fall into sin as a result (1 Cor. 8:9-10)?
- Is it a violation of the laws of my city, state, or nation (Rom. 13:1-7)?
- If I fail to do this, will I lose opportunities to share the gospel (1 Cor. 10:27-30)?
- Can I do this with a clear conscience (Acts 24:16)?
- Will this cause me to sin by feeding sinful desires (Rom.13:13-14)?
- Am I convinced that this is what God desires for me to do (Rom.13:5)?
- Does my participation proceed from my faith in Christ (Rom.14:23)?

- Am I doing this to help other people, or am I just being selfish (1 Cor. 10:24)?
- Can I do this in a way that glorifies God (1 Cor. 10:31-33)?
- Am I following the example of Jesus Christ to help save sinners (1 Cor. 10:33-11:1)?<sup>13</sup>

In conclusion, here are some ideas that may help new or weak Christians to continue to engage with their unbelieving friends while pursuing holiness:

- Inform a stronger believer of your intentions and ask them to pray for you and hold you accountable.
- Connect some of your Christian friends with some of your non-Christian friends. This will give you extra spiritual support and will also allow your unbelieving friends to experience additional gospel witness.
- Try to be the initiator of contact so that you can more likely have some say in what does or doesn’t happen. For example, rather than waiting for the old crew to invite you to the old hangouts where you’ll be more likely to fall into the old sins, you invite them to your home or to a different place where you won’t be as likely to be tempted.
- Be sure to take every opportunity arise to engage with past friends that do *not* involve tempting situations.
- If a situation arises that you know will causes you to sin, flee. Your personal obedience to Jesus trumps your loyalty to friends.
- Pray for your friends. The gospel can change anybody—after all, it changed you! So pray that the grace of Christ would penetrate the hearts of your friends so that they too may experience the joy of knowing him.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid