

CHAPTER 2

In this chapter, we have,

- I.** Christ's healing a man that was sick of a palsy (v. 1-12).
- II.** His calling of Matthew from the receipt of custom, and his eating, upon that occasion, with publicans and sinners, and justifying himself in so doing (v. 13-17).
- III.** His justifying his disciples in not fasting so much as those plucking the ears of corn on the sabbath day (v. 23-28). All which passages we had before, Matthew 9 and 12.

⦿ MARK 2:1-12

THE HEALING OF A PARALYTIC

Christ, having been for some time preaching about in the country, here returns to Capernaum his head-quarters, and makes his appearance there, in hopes that by this time the talk and crowd would be somewhat abated. Now observe,

I. The great resort there was to him. Though he was *in the house*, wither Peter's house, or some lodgings of his own which he had taken, yet people came to him as soon as it was *noised* that he was in town; they did not stay till he appeared in the synagogue, which they might be sure he would do on the *sabbath day*, but *straightway many were gathered together to him*. Where the king is, there is the court; where Shiloh is, there *shall the gathering of the people be*. In improving opportunities for our souls, we must take care not to *lose time*. One invited another (Come, let us go see Jesus), so that his house could not contain his visitants. *There was no room to receive them*, they were so numerous, *no not so much as about the door*. A blessed sight, to see people thus flying like a cloud to Christ's house, though it was but a poor one, and *as the doves to their windows!*

II. The good entertainment Christ gave them, the best his house would afford, and better than any other could; he *preached the word unto them*, v. 2. Many of them perhaps came only for cures, and many perhaps only

for curiosity, to get a sight of him; but when he had them together he *preached to them*. Though the synagogue-door was open to him at proper times, he thought it not at all amiss to preach in a house, on a week day; though some might reckon it both an improper place and an improper time. *Blessed are ye that sow beside all waters,* ^{<3320>}Isaiah 32:20.

III. The presenting of a poor cripple to him, to be helped by him. The patient was one *sick of the palsy*, it should seem not as that, ^{<4086>}Matthew 8:6, *grievously tormented*, but perfectly disabled, so that he was *borne of four*, was carried upon a *bed*, as if he had been upon a *bier*, by four persons. It was his misery, that he needed to be so carried, and bespeaks the calamitous state of human life; it was their charity, who did so carry him, and bespeaks the compassion that it is justly expected should be in the children of men toward their fellow-creatures in distress, because we know not how soon the distress may be *our own*. These kind relations or neighbours thought, if they could but carry this poor man once to Christ, they should not need to carry him any more; and therefore made hard shift to get him to him; and when they could not otherwise get to him, they *uncovered the roof where he was*, v. 4. I see no necessity to conclude that Christ was preaching in an *upper room*, though in such the Jews that had stately houses, had their oratories; for then to what purpose should the crowd stand *before the door*, as wisdom's clients used to do? ^{<3088>}Proverbs 8:34. But I rather conjecture that the house he was in, was so little and mean (agreeable to his present state), that it had no *upper room*, but the *ground-floor* was open to the roof: and these petitioners for the poor paralytic, resolving not to be disappointed, when they could not get through the crowd at the door, got their friend by some means or other to the roof of the house, took off some of the tiles, and so let him down upon his bed with cords into the house where Christ was preaching. This bespoke both their *faith* and their *fervency* in this address to Christ. Hereby it appeared that they were in earnest, and would not go away, nor *let Christ go without a blessing*. ^{<4326>}Genesis 32:26.

IV. The kind word Christ said to this poor patient; *He saw their faith*; perhaps not so much his, for his distemper hindered him from the exercise of faith, but *theirs* that brought him. In curing the centurion's servant, Christ took notice of it as an instance of *his faith*, that he did not bring him to Christ, but believed he could cure him at a distance; here he commended *their faith*, because they did bring their friend through so

much difficulty. Note, True faith and strong faith may work variously, conquering sometimes the objections of reason, sometimes those of sense; but, however manifested, it shall be accepted and approved by Jesus Christ. Christ said, *Son, thy sins be forgiven thee*. The *compellation* is very *tender* — *Son*; intimating a fatherly *care* of him and *concern* for him. Christ owns true believers as his sons: *a son*, and yet sick of the palsy. Herein God *deals with you as with sons*. The *cordial* is very rich; *Thy sins are forgiven thee*. Note,

1. Sin is the procuring cause of all our pains and sicknesses. The word of Christ was to take his thoughts off from the disease, which was the effect, and to lead them to the sin, the cause, that he might be more concerned about that, to get that pardoned.

2. God doth *then* graciously take away the sting and malignity of sickness, when he forgives sin; recovery from sickness is *then* a mercy indeed, when way is made for it by the pardon of sin. See ^{<387>}Isaiah 38:17; ^{<343>}Psalms 103:3. The way to remove the effect, is, to take away the cause. Pardon of sin strikes at the root of all diseases, and either cures them, or alters their property.

V. The cavil of the scribes at that which Christ said, and a demonstration of the unreasonableness of their cavil. They were expositors of the law, and their doctrine was *true* — that it is blasphemy for any creature to undertake the pardon of sin, and that it is God's prerogative, ^{<385>}Isaiah 43:25. But, as is usual with such teachers, their application was *false*, and was the effect of their ignorance and enmity to Christ. It is *true*, *None can forgive sins but God only*; but it is false that therefore Christ cannot, who had abundantly proved himself to have a divine power. But Christ *perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves*; this proves him to be God, and therefore confirmed what was to be proved, that he had authority to *forgive sins*; for he *searched* the heart, and knew *what was in man*, ^{<423>}Revelation 2:23. God's royalties are inseparable, and he that could *know thoughts*, could *forgive sins*. This magnifies the grace of Christ, in *pardonning sin*, that he knew men's thoughts, and therefore knows more than any other can know, both of the sinfulness of their sins and the particulars of them, and yet is ready to pardon. Now he proves his power to *forgive sin*, by demonstrating his power to cure the *man sick of the palsy*, v. 9-11. He would not have pretended to do *the one*, if he could not have done *the other*; *that ye may know that the Son of man*, the

Messiah, *has power on earth to forgive sin*, that I have that power, *Thou that art sick of the palsy, arise, take up thy bed*. Now,

1. This was a *suitable* argument in itself. He could not have cured the disease, which was the effect, if he could not have taken away the sin, which was the cause. And besides, his curing diseases was a figure of his pardoning sin, for sin is the disease of the soul; when it is pardoned, it is healed. He that could by a word accomplish the sign, could doubtless perform the thing signified,

2. It was suited to them. These carnal scribes would be more affected with such a suitable effect of a pardon as the cure of the disease, and be sooner convinced by it, than by any other more spiritual consequences; therefore it was proper enough to appeal, whether it is easier to say, *Thy sins are forgiven thee*, or to say, *Arise, and walk*? The removing of the punishment as such, was the remitting of the sin; he that could go so far in the cure, no doubt could perfect it. See ~~2324~~ Isaiah 33:24.

VI. The cure of the sick man, and the impression it made upon the people, v. 12. He not only *arise* out of his bed, perfectly well, but, to show that he had perfect strength restored to him, *he took up his bed*, because it lay in the way, *and went forth before them all*; and *they were all amazed*, as well they might, and *glorified God*, as indeed they ought; saying, “*We never saw it on this fashion*; never were such wonders as these done before in our time.” Note, Christ's works were without precedent. When we see what he does in healing souls, we must own that *we never saw the like*.

~~4023~~ MARK 2:13-17

CHRIST AMONG PUBLICANS AND SINNERS

Here is,

I. Christ preaching by the *sea-side* (v. 13), whither he went *for room*, because he found, upon second trial, no house or street large enough to contain his auditory; but upon the strand there might come as many as would. It should seem by this, that our Lord Jesus had a strong voice, and could and did speak loud; for *wisdom crieth without* in the *places of concourse*. Wherever he goes, though it be to the sea-side, *multitudes*

resort to him. Wherever the doctrine of Christ is faithfully preached, though it be driven into corners or into deserts, we must follow it.

II. His calling Levi; the same with Matthew, who had a place in the custom-house at Capernaum, from which he was denominated a *publican*; his place fixed him by the water-side, and thither Christ went to meet with him, and to give him an effectual call. This Levi is here said to be *the son of Alpheus* or *Cleophas*, husband to that Mary who was sister or near kinswoman to the virgin Mary and if so, he was own brother to James the less, and Jude, and Simon the Canaanite, so that there were four brothers of them apostles, It is probable that Matthew was but a loose extravagant young man, or else, being a Jew, he would never have been a publican. However, Christ called him to *follow him*. Paul, though a Pharisee, had been one of the chief of sinners, and yet was called to be an apostle. With God, through Christ, there is mercy to pardon the greatest sins, and grace to sanctify the greatest sinners. Matthew, that had been a publican, became an evangelist, the *first* that put pen to paper, and the *fullest* in writing the life of Christ. Great sin and scandal before conversion, are no bar to great gifts, graces, and advancements, after; nay, God may be the more glorified. Christ prevented him with this call; in bodily cures, ordinarily, he was *sought unto*, but in these spiritual cures, he was *found of them that sought him not*. For this is the great evil and peril of the disease of sin, that those who are under it, desire not to be *made whole*.

III. His familiar converse with *publicans and sinners*, v. 15. We are here told,

1. That Christ *sat at meat in Levi's house*, who invited *him and his disciples* to the farewell-feast he made to his friends, when he left all to attend on Christ: such a feast he made, as Elisha did (~~1~~1 Kings 19:21), to show, not only with what cheerfulness in himself, but with what thankfulness to God, he quitted all, in compliance with Christ's call. Fitly did he make the *day of his espousals* to Christ a festival day. This was also to testify his respect to Christ, and the grateful sense he had of his kindness, in snatching him from the receipt of custom as a brand out of the burning.

2. That *many publicans and sinners* sat with Christ in Levi's house (for *there were many* belonging to that custom-house); and *they followed him*. They followed Levi; so some understand it, supposing that, like Zaccheus,

he was *chief among the publicans*, and was *rich*; and for that reason, the inferior sort of them attended him for what they could get. I rather take it, that they *followed Jesus* because of the report they had heard of him. They did not *for conscience-sake* leave all to follow him, but *for curiosity-sake* they came to Levi's feast, to see him; whatever brought them thither, they were sitting with *Jesus and his disciples*. The publicans are here and elsewhere ranked with *sinners*, the worst of *sinners*.

(1.) Because commonly they *were such*; so general were the corruptions in the execution of that office, oppressing, exacting, and taking bribes or fees to extortion, and *accusing falsely*, ^{<483>}Luke 3:13, 14. A faithful fair-dealing publican was so rare, even at Rome, that one Sabinus, who kept a clean reputation in that office, was, after his death, honoured with this inscription, *Kalos telonesanti* — *Here lies an honest publican*.

(2.) Because the Jews had a particular antipathy to them and their office, as an affront to the liberty of their nation and a badge of their slavery, and therefore put them into an ill name, and thought it scandalous to be seen in their company. Such as these our blessed Lord was pleased to converse with, when he appeared *in the likeness of sinful flesh*.

IV. The *offence* which the scribes and Pharisees took at this, v. 16. They would not come to hear him preach, which they might have been convinced the edified by; but they would come themselves to *see him* sit with publicans and sinners, which they would be provoked by. They endeavoured to put the disciples out of conceit with their Master, as a man not of such sanctity and severe morals as became his character; and therefore put the question to them. *How is it, that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners?* Note, It is no new thing for that which is both *well-done*, and *well-designed*, to be misrepresented, and turned to the reproach of the wisest and best of men.

V. Christ's justification of himself in it, v. 17. He stood to what he did, and would not withdraw, though the Pharisees were offended, as Peter afterwards did, ^{<482>}Galatians 2:12. Note, Those are too tender of their own *good name*, who, to preserve it with some nice people, will decline a *good work*. Christ would not do so. They thought the publicans were to be *hated*. “No,” saith Christ, “they are to be *pitied*, they are *sick* and *need a physician*; they are *sinners*, and need a Saviour.” They thought Christ's character should separate him from them; “No,” saith Christ, “my

commission directs me to them; *I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance*. If the world had been *righteous*, there had been no occasion for my coming, either to *preach* repentance, or to *purchase* remission. It is to a *sinful world* that I am sent, and therefore my business lies most with those that are the greatest sinners in it.” Or thus; “*I am not come to call the righteous*, the proud Pharisees that think themselves righteous, that ask, *Wherein shall we return?* (~~308~~ Malachi 3:7), Of what shall we repent? But poor publicans, that own themselves to be sinners, and are glad to be invited and encouraged to repent.” It is good dealing with those that there is hope of; now there is *more hope of a fool* than of one that is *wise in his own conceit*, ~~310~~ Proverbs 26:12.

~~310~~ MARK 2:18-28

THE HYPOCRITICAL RIGOUR OF THE PHARISEES

Christ had been put to *justify* himself in conversing with *publicans and sinners*: here he is put to justify his disciples; and in what they do according to his will he will justify them, and bear them out.

I. He justifies them in their *not fasting*, which was turned to their reproach by the Pharisees. Why do the Pharisees and the disciples of John fast? They *used to fast*, the Pharisees fasted *twice in the week* (~~310~~ Luke 18:12), and probably the disciples of John did so too; and, it should seem, this very day, when Christ and his disciples were feasting in Levi's house, was their *fast-day*, for the word is *nesteuousi* — *they do fast, or are fasting*, which aggravated the offence. Thus apt are strict professors to make their own practice a standard, and to censure and condemn all that do not fully come up to it. They invidiously suggest that if Christ went among sinners to do them *good*, as he had pleaded, yet the disciples went to indulge their appetites, for they never knew what it was to fast, or to deny themselves. Note, Ill-will always suspects the worst.

Two things Christ pleads in excuse of his disciples *not fasting*.

1. That these were *easy days* with them, and fasting was not so *seasonable* now as it would be hereafter, v. 19, 20. There is a time for all things. Those that enter into the married state, must expect care and *trouble in the flesh*, and yet, during the nuptial solemnity, they are merry, and think it

becomes them to be so; it was very absurd for Samson's bride to *weep before him, during the days that the feast lasted*, ^{<0747>}Judges 14:17. Christ and his disciples were but newly married, the bridegroom was *yet with them*, the nuptials were yet in the celebrating (Matthew's particularly); when the bridegroom should be removed from them to the far country, about his business, then would be a proper time to sit as a widow, in solitude and fasting.

2. That these were *early days* with them, and they were not so able for the severe exercises of religion as hereafter they would be. The Pharisees had long accustomed themselves to such austerities; and John Baptist himself came neither eating nor drinking. His disciples from the first inured themselves to hardships, and thus found it easier to bear strict and frequent fasting, but it was not so with Christ's disciples; their Master came *eating and drinking*, and had not bred them up to the difficult services of religion as yet, for it was all in good time. To put them upon such frequent fasting at first, would be a discouragement to them, and perhaps drive them off from following Christ; it would be of as ill consequence as *putting new wine into old casks*, or sewing *new cloth* to that which is worn thin and threadbare, v. 21, 22. Note, God graciously *considers the frame* of young Christians, that are *weak and tender*, and so must we; nor must we expect more than the *work of the day in its day*, and that day according to the strength, because it is not in our hands to give strength according to the day. Many contract an antipathy to some kind of food, otherwise good, by being surfeited with it when they are young; so, many entertain prejudices against the exercises of devotion by being burthened with them, and *made to serve with an offering*, at their setting out. Weak Christians must take heed of *over-tasking* themselves, and of making the yoke of Christ otherwise than as it is, easy, and sweet, and pleasant.

II. He justifies them in *plucking the ears of corn on the sabbath day*, which, I will warrant you, a disciples of the Pharisees would not dare to have done; for it was contrary to an express tradition of their elders. In this instance, as in that before, they reflect upon the discipline of Christ's school, as if it were not so strict as that of theirs: so common it is for those who deny the *power of godliness*, to be jealous for the *form*, and censorious of those who affect not *their* form.

Observe,

1. What a poor breakfast Christ's disciples had on a sabbath-day morning, when they were going to church (v. 23); they *plucked the ears of corn*, and that was the best they had. They were so intent upon spiritual dainties, that they forgot even their *necessary food*; and the word of Christ was to them instead of that; and their zeal for it even *ate them up*. The Jews made it a piece of religion, to eat dainty food on sabbath days, but the disciples were content with any thing.

2. How even this was *grudged them* by the Pharisees, upon supposition that it was not lawful to *pluck the ears of corn* on the sabbath day, that that was as much a servile work as *reaping* (v. 24); *Why do they on the sabbath day that which is not lawful?* Note, If Christ's disciples do that which is unlawful, Christ will be reflected upon, and upbraided with it, as he was here, and dishonour will redound to his name. It is observable, that when the Pharisees thought Christ did amiss, they told the disciples (v. 16); and now when they thought the disciples did amiss, they spoke to Christ, as make-bates, that did what they could to sow discord between Christ and his disciples, and make a breach in the family.

3. How Christ defended them in what they did.

(1.) By example. They had a good precedent for it in David's eating the *show-bread*, when he was hungry, and there was no other bread to be had (v. 25, 26); *Have ye never read?* Note, Many of our mistakes would be rectified, and our unjust censures of others corrected, if we would but recollect what *we have read* in the scripture; appeals to that are most convincing. "You have read that David, the man after God's own heart, *when he was hungry*, made no difficulty of eating *the show-bread*, which by the law none might eat of but the priests and their families." Note, Ritual observances must give way to moral obligations; and that may be done in a case of necessity, which otherwise may not be done. This, it is said, David did in the days of *Abiathar the High-Priest*; or *just before* the days of Abiathar, who immediately succeeded Abimelech his father in the pontificate, and, it is probable, was at that time his father's deputy, or assistant, in the office; and he it was that escaped the massacre, and brought the ephod to David.

(2.) By argument. To reconcile them to the disciples' *plucking the ears of corn*, let them consider,

[1.] Whom the sabbath was *made for* (v. 27); *it was made for man, and not man for the sabbath*. This we had not in Matthew. The sabbath is a sacred and divine institution; but we must receive and embrace it as a privilege and a benefit, not as a task and a drudgery. *First*, God never designed it to be an *imposition* upon us, and therefore we must not make it so to ourselves. *Man was not made for the sabbath*, for he was made a day before the sabbath was instituted. Man was made *for God*, and for his honour and service, and he just rather die than deny him; but he was not *made for the sabbath*, so as to be tied up by the law of it, from that which is necessary to the support of his life. *Secondly*, God did design it to be an *advantage* to us, and so we must make it, and improve it. He made it *for man*.

1. He had *some* regard to our *bodies* in the institution, that they might rest, and not be tired out with the constant business of this world (^(~~1854~~)Deuteronomy 5:14); *that thy man-servant and thy maid-servant may rest*. Now he that intended the *sabbath-rest* for the *repose* of our bodies, certainly never intended it should restrain us, in a case of necessity, from fetching in the necessary *supports* of the body; it must be construed so as not to contradict itself — for *edification*, and not for *destruction*.

2. He had *much more* regard to our *souls*. The *sabbath* was made a day of rest, only in order to its being a day of holy work, a day of communion with God, a day of praise and thanksgiving; and the rest from worldly business is *therefore* necessary, that we may closely apply ourselves to this work, and spend the whole time in it, in public and in private; but then time is allowed us for that which is necessary to the fitting of our bodies for the service of our souls in God's service, and the enabling of them to *keep pace* with them in that work. See here,

(1.) What a *good Master* we serve, all whose institutions are for our own benefit, and if we be so wise as to observe them, we are *wise for ourselves*; it is not he, but we, that are gainers by our service.

(2.) What we should aim at in our *sabbath work*, even the good of our own souls. If the sabbath was made for man, we should then ask ourselves at night, “What am I the better for this sabbath day?”

(3.) What care we ought to take not to make those exercises of religion burthens to ourselves or others, which God ordained to be blessings; neither adding to the command by unreasonable strictness, nor indulging

those corruptions which are adverse to the command, for thereby we make those devout exercises a penance to ourselves, which otherwise would be a pleasure.

[2.] Whom the sabbath was *made by* (v. 28); “*The Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath*; and therefore he will not see the kind intentions of the institution of it frustrated by your impositions.” Note, The sabbath days are *days of the Son of man*; he is the Lord of the day, and to his honour it must be observed; by him God made the worlds, and so it was by him that the sabbath was first instituted; by him God gave the law at mount Sinai, and so the *fourth* commandment was *his law*; and that little alteration that was shortly to be made, by the shifting of it one day forward to the first day of the week, was to be in remembrance of *his* resurrection, and therefore the Christian sabbath was to be called *the Lord's day* (Revelation 1:10), the Lord Christ's day; and the *Son of man*, Christ, as Mediator, is always to be looked upon as Lord of the sabbath. This argument he largely insists upon in his own justification, when he was charged with having broken the sabbath, John 5:16.