*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

January 11 - 16

Mark’s Gospel

**Monday, January 11 Mark 2:1-12**

*“Your sins are forgiven”*

The healing of the paralyzed man shows that while still responding tenderly to people in need, Jesus has the ability to take the intellectual initiative. In the contest over Jesus’ authority to forgive sins, Mark gives us insights into the mind of Jesus. While he is preaching in a crowded house, Jesus is startled by the debris falling on his head as a hole is being opened in the ceiling and a man is lowered on a stretcher. Rather than rebuke the man and his friends for interrupting him, he tells the paralyzed man that his sins are forgiven.

At first, Jesus’ words seem inappropriate. Unless sin is the cause of paralysis, the poor man needs healing, not forgiveness. Yet, it is always in the mind of Jesus to see people as needing forgiveness, regardless of their physical situation. When the teachers of the law challenge Jesus’ authority to forgive sins, he shows that he has the authority to speak forgiveness by speaking a miraculous healing. His opponents fall silent before the indisputable logic and authentic ring of a man who knows himself, his mission, and his authority.

*I thank you, Lord, that you have the authority to forgive my sin. Amen.*

**Tuesday, January 12 Mark 2:13-22**

*“Ministry of hope and joy”*

Why would Jesus call Levi to be a disciple? The truth is that Jesus specializes in rejects, giving hope to those society considers hopeless. Whether in Levi, or Peter, or Mary Magdalene, he sees the potential for spiritual growth. Seeing something of great value in a rejected man, Jesus puts him to the test by saying, “Follow me.” Without hesitation, Levi walks away from his tax tables forever. Later, in Levi’s home, Jesus continues his ministry of hope by affirming social and spiritual outcasts as worthy of God’s grace.

Fasting is the issue when the Pharisees concoct a scheme to discredit Jesus. They point out that while John’s disciples observe the Pharisees’ fast days, Jesus’ disciples do not. Jesus’ response is to bring back the analogy of the bridegroom that John the Baptist had used in order to confirm the ministry of joy as a keynote of the Kingdom of God. While he, Jesus, the bridegroom, is living and ministering to his bride, that is, his followers, there is cause for rejoicing. The day will come when the bridegroom is taken away, and fasting will be appropriate then.

*In you I place my hope, Lord, and in my relationship with you I rejoice. Amen.*

**Wednesday, January 13 Mark 2:23 – 3:6**

*“Lord of the Sabbath”*

What starts out as a natural and innocent act by Jesus’ disciples ends up escalating to a confrontation between the authority of Jesus and the authority of the Pharisees. By picking and eating grain on the Sabbath, the Pharisees claim that the disciples have disobeyed the fourth commandment which is to keep the Sabbath holy. Jesus declares that two principles guide the Sabbath. The first principle is that God created the Sabbath for the benefit of humanity. The second principle is that he, Jesus, has the authority to determine what is beneficial.

In chapter two, Jesus has dealt with the religious leaders challenging him on such issues as forgiveness, eating with sinners, fasting and Sabbath rules. While winning the debates, he has not won over his opponents. Now in chapter three he takes the offensive when he returns to the synagogue on the Sabbath day. Without waiting for them to raise their objections to healing on the Sabbath, he chastises them for their lack of mercy toward others and restores a man’s withered hand.

*Your ministry, Lord, revealed the grace and mercy of the Father. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

January 11 - 16

Mark’s Gospel

**Thursday, January 14 Mark 3:7-12**

*“A large crowd followed him”*

Jesus retreats from the threat posed by the Pharisees and the supporters of King Herod (3:6), but he cannot escape his immense popularity. Throngs flocked to John the Baptist from all Judea and Jerusalem, but they come to Jesus from even more far-flung regions. The sick and downcast no longer wait for his touch but now throw themselves upon him. This exuberant crush of people stands in stark contrast to the grim verdict of the teachers of the law from Jerusalem and also explains why they are so worried about Jesus. His surging popularity threatens to undermine their leverage with the people.

The unclean spirits continue to know him, fall before him in surrender, and blurt out his identity. Unlike the demon who hailed him as the “Holy One of God” (1:24), their cry of recognition acknowledges him as “the Son of God” and more closely echoes the heavenly voice at the baptism (1:11). However, while the demons utter truth about Jesus, they are by no means “well pleased” by the presence of the Son of God.

*I am well pleased, Lord, to be your follower. Amen.*

**Friday, January 15 Mark 3:13-19**

*“He appointed twelve of them”*

The huge multitude at the sea is thinned as Jesus invites to the mountain a chosen group of twelve men. The list of the names of the Twelve gives us scant clues as to their status, background or religious training, but Jesus gives the first three striking nicknames. Simon is given the name Peter (*petros*, meaning “rock”), and James and John, formerly introduced as the sons of Zebedee, are called the “Sons of Thunder.” Judas comes last in the list and is identified as the betrayer.

The mission of the Twelve is twofold. They are to be with Jesus, witnessing his ministry and learning from him, and eventually pass on and authenticate the traditions about him. They are no longer simply hanging around with Jesus, but they must follow wherever he leads and share the toil of the ministry, the harassment of the crowds, and the bitter taste of suffering. Their second task is to fulfill the commission of extending Jesus’ work by preaching and casting out demons. They are not merely on the receiving end of this outbreak of power but are to become channels by which it touches others.

*May I be a channel of your love, Lord, that it may touch others. Amen.*

**Saturday, January 16 Mark 3:20-35**

*“Son of God or Son of Satan?”*

Jesus is so absorbed by his task that food loses its importance. A call to eat is neglected; a plate put at his feet goes untouched. Friends begin to worry. In a culture where meals are rituals and food is scarce, anyone who refuses to eat must be “out of his mind.” They call his family, thinking that they can bring him to his senses. Pharisees, as we expect by now, try to capitalize on the situation. In a devilish turn of mind, they twist the charge of madness into deliberate evil. According to them, Jesus is not demented, but demon-possessed; he is not the Son of God, he is the Son of Satan!

Although he has no trouble exposing the absurdity of their accusation, he proclaims the charge to be a sin for which there is no forgiveness. This is the sin of claiming that the ministry of the Holy Spirit in and through Jesus is actually the work of Satan. It is unbelief, and the one who dies in unbelief is eternally lost. Even members of his own family can only stand in solidarity with Jesus if they follow God’s will by believing that he is the Son of God.

*Many false things are said of you, Lord, but I believe you are the Son of God. Amen.*