

## Mark 2 (cont.)

### 2:13-14 The calling of Levi (= Matthew?)

- The gospel of Matthew gives the name “Matthew” (See Matt. 9:9)
- It is unclear if he was a tax collector for the Romans or for Herod Antipas
  - Since both were hated, he would have been hated in either case
  - Tax collectors made their income by overtaxing, so they were wealthy
- Note how immediately he gives up his money/position to follow Jesus

### 2:15-17 Jesus eats with tax collectors and sinners

- Unclear if there are two groups or one (scribes who were Pharisees)
- Scribes were teachers of the law
- Pharisees were Jews who sought to follow the laws perfectly
- Eating had important implications
  - Whom you ate with defined your social standing
  - Eating with sinners risked defiling yourself

### 2:18-20 Fasting, Jesus as bridegroom

- It is unclear if this is Jesus home or Levi's; probably the latter
- The Pharisees are probably trying to drive a wedge between John the Baptist's followers and Jesus' followers
- The Pharisees/John probably fasted to hasten the coming of the messiah
- By calling himself the bridegroom, Jesus is implicitly naming himself messiah
- Even this early, Mark has Jesus speaking of his crucifixion – the central story in Mark

### 2:21-22 Parables of cloth and wine

- Both stories suggest that Christianity is new, not just a modification of Judaism
- Nonetheless, Jesus seems intent on preserving both the new *and* the old
- New cloth will shrink over time (as opposed to already shrunk cloth)
- Wineskins, when new, are stretchy. Wine, when new, is fermenting/giving off gasses

### 2:23-28 Violating the Sabbath

- The disciples are doing work (harvesting) on the Sabbath
  - Expressly forbidden by the commandments Ex. 20:8-11 and Ex. 31:16
  - Exceptions were granted for saving life; this doesn't seem to be such a case
  - Gleaning from another's field was expressly allowed Deut. 23:25
- The incident described is in I Sam. 21
  - Mark botches the priest's name
  - Uses the historical example of David to justify Disciples' behavior
  - The restrictions on the showbread are in Lev. 24:5-9
- Jesus seems to be arguing for a less legalistic interpretation of the rules – religion has more to do with compassion than with following rules

## Mark 3

### 3:1-6 Healing of the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath

- Jesus went back into the synagogue, where he at this point is probably unwelcome
- Luke 6:6 says it was the man's right hand
- Gospel of the Hebrews says he was a mason, who needed his hands for work
- This withered hand was due to illness, not congenital
- Strict interpretation of Jewish Law only allowed medical intervention if risk of life was involved
  - Not clear that this applies in this case, since he isn't doing work (?)
  - Not all Jews interpreted things this strictly
- Jesus again emphasizes the primacy of doing what is right over following rules
- Jesus' questions force them to face their own hypocrisy
- Jesus' confounding of them leads to their plans against him
  - Herodians were followers of dynasty of Herod
  - Set up by Romans, so they were supporting Roman rule
  - Pharisees plotting with Herodians clearly violated their own rules
  - Demonstrated their hypocrisy
- Notice Jesus' anger – the human side of Jesus – emphasized in Mark

### 3:7-12 Jesus' growing fame and his resistance to it

- It is not clear if Jesus is retreating in fear (after the trouble he just caused), avoiding immediate conflict, or simply going somewhere new
- Followers coming from many places – Jesus' fame is great
- Some of the areas contained large numbers of Gentiles
  - Matt. 12:15-21 suggests Jesus was ministering to Gentiles too
- v. 10, diseases implies scourges as divine punishments for sins
- The demons – supernatural malevolent entities – again acknowledge who he is
  - “Son of God” – implies a close relationship with God, probably messianic
  - Jesus commands the demon to retain the Messianic secret

### 3:13-19a The Twelve Apostles

- Small discrepancies between the gospels:
  - Luke lists “Judas the son of James” instead of “Thaddeus” Luke 6:16
  - John doesn't have a complete list, but has “Nathanael” John 1:45-49, possibly same as Bartholomew
- The sons of Zebedee surnamed “thunder,” probably for their rhetorical skill
- Simon the Cananaean is called “Zealot” in Luke 6:15; the zealots were radical nationalists
- Diversity – different levels of religiousness, and everything from toadies of the Romans to fierce patriots
- Christianity starts with community – the word Pharisee means “apart”

### **3:19b-21 His Family thinks Jesus is crazy**

- Not completely clear if this is his family or what
- Clearly, they were concerned for his safety

### **3:22-27 Jesus accused of being in league with Beelzebub**

- Scribes are teachers of the law – they claim Jesus heals by invoking a greater demon
- Jesus asserts this makes little sense – why would Beelzebub oppose his own servants?
- Analogy – the only way to defeat someone is to be stronger than them

### **3:28-30 Jesus warns against blaspheming him**

- He responds with the accusation by claiming that this is an unforgiveable sin
- My interpretation: This was early Christian response to criticism
- Clearly, the condemnation is against labeling God’s work as Satan’s work

### **3:31-35 Jesus defines family**

- Wording suggests Jesus has full brothers – Mary did not remain a virgin after Jesus’ birth
  - Some claim these are half-brothers (Joseph’s from a previous marriage)
  - Others claim they are technically cousins
- Jesus says ties of Christianity surpass those of family
  - At the time, family ties were considered the most important of all – even surpassing other moral obligations
- Note again the emphasis on community within the Christian church

## **Mark 4**

### **4: 1-2, and 10-12, and 33-34 Jesus teaches in parables**

- Why does Jesus speak in parables?
  - He was no longer in the synagogue – he had to hold the audience’s attention
  - Stories make learning easier
  - He is forcing his audience to engage in active learning
  - He *wants* people to not understand it. They don’t deserve it
    - More evidence for the Messianic Secret
    - He quotes Isa. 6:9, where similarly God wants people not to learn
- In v. 11, Greek word “mystery” appears
  - This refers, apparently to “mystery” religions
  - Mystery religions included stories of resurrection
  - The “mysteries” were simple secrets that were reserved for initiates
  - Some think early Christianity was a mystery religion

#### **4: 3-9 and 13-20 The Parable of the Sower**

- “The path” refers to narrow rights-of-way where the ground would get beaten down by the passage of innumerable passers by
- “Rocky ground” refers to areas with a thin layer of soil covering rock
- To me, aspects of this story make it sound like it has a later origin, since it seems to suggest Christians who later abandon Christianity
- Parable was meant to be heard, not studied
  - Its point is that even though often our work seems for naught, in the end, the harvest may still be plentiful

#### **4: 21-25 Sayings of Jesus**

- Though they are together in Mark, they seem unconnected
- They are scattered throughout Matthew
- Probably said at many different times
- v. 21: Suggests Jesus does NOT want his teachings hidden, apparently contradicting 4:11
- v. 22: Suggests if Jesus DID keep anything secret, it was only for temporary reasons
- v.24: Suggests we are rewarded (in this life?) for what we do for others
- v. 25 suggests once you have some truth, it helps you get more

#### **4:26-29 Parable of the seed growing secretly**

- This parable is peculiar to Mark
- Though we play a part in “sowing the seed,” its growth ultimately is not our responsibility
- The growth occurs in the souls of men, which is unknowable
- None of us knows when our work may bear fruit
- We must be prepared at all times

#### **4:30-32 Parable of the mustard seed**

- Mustard seed is not the smallest seed, but was used metaphorically to mean “a very small quantity”
- Mustard plant grew to large size – taller than a horse and rider
- Apparently symbolic of the growth of the church from small beginnings

#### **4:35-41 Jesus stills the storm**

- Several details peculiar to Mark: The mention of other boats, the pillow Jesus’ head is on
- Story’s purpose seems to demonstrate Jesus’ power once more
- Somehow, this impresses the disciples more than the previous miracles
- Odd that Jesus slept through this until he was awakened
- Jesus rebukes the storm with the same word he does unclean spirits
  - In contemporary thought, they were *both* caused by malevolent powers
- Jesus criticizes the disciples for lack of faith

## Mark 5

### 5:1-13 The driving out of legion demons

- Matt. 8:28 has Gadarenes, not Gerasenes, and it has two demoniacs
- It was supposed that evil supernatural powers had possessed the insane man
- The meeting occurs right after the evening boat crossing, possibly at night
- These powers were aware that Jesus is the Messiah, as usual
- Interestingly, Jesus apparently failed on his first attempt:
  - 5:8 implies the demon resisted after Jesus had ordered them out
- Popular view at the time: Knowing a demon's name gave one power over it
- Recall, swine are unclean, perhaps fitting vessels for an unclean spirit
- Some interpreters claim that it is the wild man's raving that caused the death of the swine – though this is apparently not Mark's interpretation

### 5:14-20 The reaction of the town and of the healed man

- The townspeople are understandably amazed
- They are frightened by this revelation of divine power?
- The economic loss of so many pigs was not insignificant
  - Perhaps a sign that they value possessions more than people?
- *This time* Jesus encourages spreading the good news
  - This area is gentile country – less likely to cause civil unrest at this point
  - The Decapolis is a Greek affiliation of cities loosely under Roman rule
  - First evidence of ministry outside of Judaism

### 5:21-24a The healing of Jairus's daughter, part I

- An excellent example of a Markan sandwich (or chiasm) with one story sandwiched between two halves of another
  - The two stories are intended to be connected by the reader
  - The stories are either analogous or contrasting
- The ruler of the synagogue – an important person – went to Jesus in person
  - He could have sent a servant
  - He fell at Jesus' feet – a sign of submission
  - He expresses extreme faith

### 5:24b-34 The healing of the hemorrhaging woman

- During a woman's menstrual period, they were considered unclean
  - They were not to touch anyone during this period
  - They were not supposed to be out in public
- Mark emphasizes her plight; conventional cures had failed her
- The woman was touching one of four tassels that Jews had on their clothing, to remind them of God's commands
- Disciples confused about touch – they thought he just meant physical contact
- Jesus ascribes her healing to her faith

### **5:35-42 The healing of Jairus's daughter, part II**

- Note the lack of faith of Jairus's servants
  - Perhaps due to their distrust of this upstart nobody?
- Jesus emphasizes to Jairus the importance of belief – when he had just witnessed the other healing and Jesus emphasized faith
- Jesus deliberately excludes any who might doubt him
- People were expected to weep and wail loudly upon the death of a loved one
  - Public expression of grief – such as tearing of clothing – was *expected*
  - The wealthy would hire professional mourners to create a commotion
  - Matt. 9:23 mentions 'flute players' – musicians hired for the occasion
- The servants laugh at him
- Interesting he describes "death" as "sleep" – but there is no question Mark is describing this as a raising from the dead
- The daughter's age is given as twelve years
  - In a way the saddest time to lose a child, just short of adulthood (13 in Jewish tradition)
  - Note same number of years as the woman's issue of blood
- Once again, Jesus asks them to keep the messianic secret

## **Mark 13**

### **13:1-2 The destruction of Herod's Temple**

- This appears to be a literal reference to Herod's Temple, which was quite ornate and magnificent
- The temple of Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 AD. Based on your opinion about prophesy, this suggests Mark was written slightly before or slightly after 70 AD.

### **13:3-8 False signs of the End Times**

- Speech is delivered from the Mount of Olives – in plain sight of the Temple and also where Zecharia prophesied the last battle would occur
- Note the presence of Peter – recall Mark probably comes through Peter
- Possible reference to post-Jesus pretenders who claimed to be Jesus returned
  - Acts 5:33-39 may be references to such pretenders
- Mark probably written at a time of "wars and rumors of wars."
- Apparently there really WERE massive earthquakes around this time according to Josephus
- Famines occurred in Palestine ca. 50 AD.
- Birth pangs in 13:8 suggests a time of great pain to prepare for a great reward

### **13:9-13 Warnings of the Tribulations of Jesus' followers**

- Mention of "must first be preached to all nations" has been interpreted to imply that Jesus intended this to refer to some distant future end time
- Interesting suggestion that you don't need to prepare what to say
- Suggests to me early Christians were already suffering (Paul, for example)
- Recall earlier Jesus' description of who your true family is

### **13:14-23 Signs of the True End Times**

- Mark 13:14 suggests some code that was understood by the listeners.
  - Apparently a reference to Daniel 9:27
  - Possible reference to Caligula who attempted to put his statue in the temple
  - Since then it has been interpreted as the Antichrist or the destruction of the temple
- Suggestion of the imminence of the end times.

### **13:24-37 The Little Apocalypse, or Olivet Discourse, and warning to be ready**

- Again, the imminence is stressed again
- The reference is to Isaiah 13:10, a prophecy about the fall of Babylon
- The fig tree that was cursed for being barren is now used as a metaphor that it can be a sign of something coming
- Early Christians apparently believed Jesus would come in their lifetime
- Clear Mark intended this to mean that all events would come within their lifetime
- Legend of wandering Jew sometimes attributed to this passage
  - Implication – that *one person* listening to Jesus must still be alive, somewhere
- Some have interpreted this to mean it already happened, somehow
  - This is common of apocalyptic sects within religions – when nothing dramatic happens, they conclude that it *did* happen, but we misunderstood it
- Jesus claims that no one – *even him* – knows when it will happen
  - Jesus is apparently not omniscient?
  - Others say Jesus put aside his omniscience to become human
- Jesus apparently wants us to be always watchful

## **Mark 14**

### **14:1-2 The Priests and Scribes conspire to kill Jesus**

- We are leading up to Jesus' crucifixion here.
- Apparently they didn't want to kill him on Passover, but depending on what time Friday he was killed, he may have been anyway

### **14:3-9 The woman anoints Jesus**

- A denarius is a day's wage – the value is a year's worth of wages
- Jesus is eating with a leper – again, a sign of his connection with those who were outcast
- According to John 12, the woman is the sister of Lazarus
- Note Jesus compliments the woman's generosity, and her loving act
  - Suggests symbolism can be important – we should hesitate to criticize those who do something symbolic that could be done more efficiently
- Foreshadowing of Jesus' impending death
- Jesus nonetheless exhorts us to help the poor
- Mark (Peter) blames the disciples for this criticism
  - This is a theme – the disciples themselves are shown as failing

### **14:10-11 Judas prepares to betray Jesus**

### **14:12-16 Preparation for Passover**

- This is now the day of the last supper (as reckoned by us).
- Apparently it was common to pay as rent for the room the skins from the sacrificed animals
- Perhaps this was a former disciple of Jesus?

### **14:17-25 The Last Supper**

- Jesus' phrase describing Judas was a popular phrase, normally used to describe those who know rabbinic law but ignore it
- Was Judas' betrayal necessary? If so, why do we condemn him?
- Eating with Jesus was an intimate sharing – the description of Judas' betrayal is all the worse for this reason
- This supper was apparently a Lord's supper
- Jesus takes Jewish ritual and gives it new meaning
- Sharing of the Lord's supper was an important part of early worship
- Different gospels disagree on whether Judas was present
- Jesus reference to the wine *after* he has transformed it suggests he did not mean blood *literally*
- Unclear when Jesus will again drink of the fruit of the vine
- Both references (bread and wine) suggest Jesus' imminent death

### **14:26-31 Betrayal of Peter and the Disciples foretold**

- Jesus is quoting Zechariah 13:7
  - Explicitly messianic writing
- This passage is the first part of a Markan sandwich – the faithlessness of Peter
- Again, we are seeing Mark's portrayal – probably through Peter's eyes
- The statement that the cock will crow *twice* was probably not in the original

### **14:32-42 The Garden of Gethsemane**

- Very human picture of Jesus – he feels fear from his impending fate
- Nonetheless, he is submissive to God's will
- Note disciples fail to *stay awake* even after they have promised to follow him *to death*
  - Since death is a euphemism for death, this seems especially ironic
- Three-fold repetition similar to Peter's three-fold failure
- This example of temptation foreshadows their greater denial later
  - Do we deny Christ in small ways? How much more so in great things?
- The middle part of the sandwich – Jesus' faithfulness contrasted with the disciple's weakness

#### **14:43-52 The betrayal of Jesus**

- Jesus' comments highlight their hypocrisy
- To this last moment, the followers *still* expect Jesus to be a military leader
- A kiss as betrayal shows the dishonesty of Judas and the priests
- These are temple guards
- The young man (51-52) is peculiar to Mark
  - Some have suggested this may be Mark himself

#### **14:53-65 Jesus' trial**

- This is a trial before the Sanhedrin, but if accurately recorded, it did not follow the proper rules of law
- Clearly, false witnesses were procured
- Deuteronomy 19:15 states the multiple witnesses must agree with each other
- John 2:19 suggests Jesus actually *did* say words very similar to this, but was misunderstood
- By claiming to be the son of God, he was making himself equal to God, blasphemy
- Jesus is condemned as a false prophet – ironically, exactly what Jesus predicted would happen
- Note that Jesus, in contrast to the disciples, makes no attempt to avoid his fate
  - Once again, the middle part of the sandwich.

#### **14:66-72 Peter's denial**

- The end of the Markan sandwich
- The first cock crowing, and the use of the word second, may not be in the original
- Peter's remorse at his failure
  - Note that his denials are virtually coincident with Jesus' affirmations
  - His remorse is apparently ultimately accepted by Jesus – he becomes the head of the nascent Christian church