KCC Jan 2006; 15-March-2026

Jesus in Conflict – Five Stories
Mark 2:1 – 3:6

Turn to Mark 2 please. What did Jesus do that got him in trouble? Mark 2:1 – 3:6 has five little stories in which Jesus does what he does, and says what he says, and the religious leaders don't like it. Take a look at the end of the last story, Mark 3:6 – "*Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus*."

The conflicts were serious enough in some people's minds that Jesus needed to be killed. This verse surprises us because it occurs so early in the Gospel. Two chapters and a bit, and people already want to kill the Christ, the Son of God, the one bringing the kingdom!

These five conflict stories are collected here to show us right from the start that Jesus was in conflict. He wasn't going after anyone, he did not attack anyone. But for one reason or another, they did not like what he was doing.

Time Progressions in Mark

Clear time sequence in Mark 1:
Mark 1:21 - "*when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue*."
Mark 1:29 - "*as soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew*."
Mark 1:32 - "*That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon possessed. The whole town gathered at the door*."
Mark 1:35 - "*Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed*."

Vague time progressions in Mark 2:1 - 3:6, the five conflict stories
Mark 2:1 - "*Some time later…*"
Mark 2:13 - "*Once again Jesus went out…* " - no time reference at all.
Mark 2:18 - "*Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting….*" No time reference, and not even the order of events. This perhaps happened before some of the earlier stories.
Mark 2:23 - "*One Sabbath….*" Again, no time reference and no order of events.
Mark 3:1 - "*Another time he went into the synagogue…*" No time reference, and no sequence is implied.

The Scripture is careful not to mislead us. When we are getting events right after another, like we saw in Mark 1, we are told that. In Mark 2:1 to 3:6, the Scripture does not tell us we are getting events right after another. It just says, "here is something that happened." Mark put these five stories together more by topic than by order of events.

Later on, the Gospel of Mark gets clearer about time again, but the Scripture tells us that these stories are not here because they happened one after another in this order. They are collected here to show us Jesus in conflict, and to show us that this happened to him right from the start.

1 Authority to Forgive Sins (2:1–12)

A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, "Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So he said to the man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

2:5–7 "*When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven.' Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, 'Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone*?'"

Jesus has the right to say, "your sins are forgiven." (It is also startling that Jesus says this in response to the friends' faith, not the paralytic's, but we'll let that go.)

The law teachers' response makes sense. They are right. Forgiving sins belongs to God alone. So Jesus heals the man, to show that the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins. But you can understand leaders saying to each other afterward, "who does he think he is?" That's a very good question, and Jesus wanted them to be asking that.

The thing is, no one asked for forgiveness sins. The friends just want the man healed. Why did Jesus bring it up? Because he wants them to know he has authority to forgive sins. He wants them to ask themselves, "Who is this? Who does he think he is?" He wants them to be thinking about who he is.

2 Eating with Tax Collectors and Sinners (2:13–17)

Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him.

While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

"Sinners" were Jews who had given up. They had quit trying to obey God. They were just trying to survive little longer. They made no attempt to follow God's laws, and it showed. Peter and Andrew and James and John were not sinners in this sense. In Acts, Peter told the Lord that he had never eaten unclean meat. He was telling the truth. Sinners did not care about the food laws of Moses.

No one in this church is a sinner in that sense. We have people in our world like this, but they do not go to church on Sunday morning. Tax collectors and sinners were unclean people. They said and did things God's people shouldn't do. Pharisees said that those who obeyed God should stay away from these unclean people, and that was the tension with Jesus.

Jesus agreed that the sinners and tax collectors were far from God. They were not okay. They were spiritually sick and needed healing. But being with them did not make him unclean. He welcomed them. He generally did not go to them. They came to him.

Luke 15 tells us that the tax collectors and sinners all gathered around to hear Jesus. That was normal, and he welcomed them. Jesus and his message attracted them. One of the reasons was that he didn't treat them like dirty people. He treated them like everyone else. If they invited him to their homes, he was as happy there as in a Pharisee's home. Levi the tax collector would have his booth on a main street, and Jesus walked there and called him to follow.

Jesus had authority to put into place a different kind of righteousness than the Pharisees had. Following Jesus was a hard call, in Mark as in the other Gospels. But Jesus made sure that the sinners and spiritual losers had an equal chance. It was no harder for them than for others.

Jesus had a different righteousness. On Sabbath laws and eating with sinners, he was kinder than the Pharisees. Regarding marriage and divorce and adultery, for example, he was stricter than Moses and stricter than the Pharisees. He was his own authority on all these things, and that upset people.

3 No Fasting when the Bridegroom is Here (2:16–22)

Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. Some people came and asked Jesus, "How is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?" Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them. But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast.

"No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. Otherwise, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins."

"*How is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?" Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them?"*

Jesus called himself the bridegroom. That's not an Old Testament term for the messiah, but in a veiled way, Jesus is claiming to be the messiah. Jesus assumes he is different than the Pharisees, different than John the Baptist. Being with Jesus was like being at a wedding, where fasting was out of the question. He was not against fasting. But fasting with Jesus present made no sense.

Again, those people went away asking, "who does he think he is?" Jesus was mysterious about who he was. He was not direct. But he did claim to be someone from God who was more important than anyone else. And again, you can see his different kind of righteousness. Fasting was fine but not essential.

They had to take Jesus seriously, because he healed a lot of people, and the demons obeyed him. The hand of God was on him. Who is he?

4 The Lord of the Sabbath (2:23–28)

One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?" He answered, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions." Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

Why does Jesus talk about what David did? The story is in 1 Samuel 21. Jesus is not teaching that if we're hungry we can break the law. Nothing in the story says that the disciples were hungry. By this stage in David's life, he was already the anointed and chosen king of Israel. That's why David could take what was sacred, and give it to his friends as well.

Without saying it in so many words, Jesus implies that if David the anointed king can do this with his friends, Jesus can do this with his disciples. Again, who does he think he is? Who is he?

Then Jesus ends with this whopper: The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath. Earlier he said that the Son of Man could forgive sins. Now, the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath. That is, the Son of Man decides how to keep the Sabbath day holy. Don't tell the Son of Man how to keep the Sabbath. The Son of Man will tell you how to keep the Sabbath. Who is he?

5 Healing on the Sabbath (3:1–6)

Another time Jesus went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, "Stand up in front of everyone." Then Jesus asked them, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they remained silent. He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored. Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.

Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?

Here Jesus does not claim to be anything special himself, he just teaches a different style of righteousness. He had a quiet authority to revise their righteousness. And then he acts on it by healing on the Sabbath.

They understood Jesus' work as being a healer, like a doctor. If this is his work, he should not be doing it on the Sabbath. I can see their point. Jesus probably could, too, but something else was more important: different kind of righteousness.

After this event, they begin planning to kill Jesus. The Pharisees and the Herodians are a strange partnership. Jesus was religiously dangerous and politically dangerous. He did not follow their systems, and he was so very popular. For different reasons they agreed that he should die.

Jesus got in conflict mostly because he spoke as one who was himself the authority on these things. He spoke as knowing God's truth on these things. He prodded them to figure out who he was, but did not use terms about himself that would be clear to them. He was veiled about himself.

He also spoke as one who knew what righteousness actually was. In the process he offended the Pharisees, who were sure they knew what righteousness was. Jesus and the Pharisees connected so often because outside of Jesus, the Pharisees were the only ones who genuinely cared about true righteousness. Jesus and the Pharisees had that important interest in common.

6 How Did Jesus Handle Conflict?

One, Jesus did not attack. He did not preach against those who challenged him. Not once in these five stories does he ever accuse the unbelieving with anything. Not once does he preach against them. Even in the last story, where he is angry at their hardness, he does nothing. He heals the man and lets it go.

Two, instead of attacking, he explained himself. That's all. He healed the paralytic as evidence that he could forgive sins, and then walked away.

To teachers of the law who were Pharisees (2:16), he says, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." He allows that they, the Pharisees, are the righteous, the healthy who don't need a doctor. It was a gracious way to defend eating with dirty people.

Same with the Sabbath: he uses the Scripture to show that the disciples are like David's followers, then he argues that it must be lawful to do good on the Sabbath. Later on, Jesus went after these people a few times, but it was not his usual style. Same with fasting: he was gentle and patient.

Three, he did not back off. He continued to show that he had all authority, and he continued to teach and live out his different righteousness. It got him in trouble, eventually it caused his death. He did not bend to their pressure. He kept doing what he did, saying what he said. Let's do the same. Amen.

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, we are getting a look at you. You are not always easy to understand. But you're our authority on all these things. Help us to grasp what you were teaching. Thank you for these stories. Thank you that we know who you are! May we handle conflict as you did. Amen.

BENEDICTION: May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.