

# **Commentary on Mark**

**By**

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## Author's Introduction

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### Mark

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It is interesting to notice the differing emphases of the Holy Spirit in His presentation of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ in each of the four Gospels. In them we have four portraits of our Savior. The Gospel of Matthew sets Him forth as the King, the Messiah of Israel—hence the genealogy proving Him to be the Son of David and Son of Abraham. This also accounts for the many references to and quotations from the Old Testament Scriptures found in Matthew. The Gospel of Luke presents Him as the perfect man, the unique Son of man who came to seek and to save the lost. A singular feature of Luke's record is that of the table talk of Jesus. Is there any function better than a dinner party for allowing a man to relax and open up his heart? And in Luke we see our Lord on many such occasions. The book of Luke traces His genealogy back to Adam through Heli, the father of Mary and hence the father-in-law of Joseph (**Luke 3:23**). The Gospel of John tells us plainly his object was to show "that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name" (**John 20:31**). John's account shows that He is the eternal Word who became flesh for our redemption.

To Mark it fell by divine appointment to show us the Son of God acting in lowly grace and devoted subjection to the Father as the perfect servant and prophet of the holy One. Mark plunged at once into his subject. In the short space of sixteen chapters he set forth the busy Servant engaged in one work of mercy after another, hastening from place to place as He does His Father's bidding. Because we are not concerned about a servant's forebears, but rather about his ability, there is no genealogy at all in this Gospel. Instead

Mark revealed Jesus' marvelous record of doing good and making known the mind of God. It has often been pointed out that Mark used a word variously translated "immediately," "straightway," "forthwith," and "anon," over forty times, and this word is found only about the same number of times in all the rest of the New Testament. "The king's business requireth haste," and Jesus was ever busy in the great work for which He came into the world.

The sacrifice of the cross is presented differently too in each Gospel. Each writer had in mind a comparison to a different Levitical offering (**Leviticus 1-7**). John told of the death of the Lord as the *burnt offering*—the Son laying down His life to glorify the Father in the world where He had been so dishonored by sinful men. Luke portrayed that great sacrifice as the *peace offering*—Christ making peace by the blood of His cross so that God and man may be reconciled and have hallowed fellowship together. Matthew, as becomes one whose theme is the government of God, clearly identified the work of the cross with the *trespass offering*, because of which the Lord could say, "Then I restored that which I took not away" (**Psalms 69:4**).

But in Mark's account we gaze in awe and wonder at the holy One made sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. The great *sin offering* is set before us—Christ dying not only for trespasses committed, but because of our sinful nature, which is made evident by our practice.

I dwell on these points because of the foolish things many have taught. For instance, some speculate that Mark's Gospel was the first effort to try to recall and set forth the story of Jesus, and that this was amplified and altered by the writers of the other Gospels, who may or may not have been the persons whose names are linked with them. But we

may be assured that all such speculations are idle and vain. The imprint of the divine mind is on every page of these records, and their very differences (but never contradictions) as well as their agreements are but evidence of God's inspiration.

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### **The Object of Mark's Gospel**

Mark's supreme object was to show the Gentile world the active love of God in Jesus the Christ, who served needy men, sought after sinners, and saved all who trusted Him. If one had no other part of Scripture but this brief Gospel, he would have enough to show any troubled heart and conscience the way of life and peace.

We need not question whether Mark may, from the human standpoint, have been indebted to Peter for much of the information conveyed. All that was written was arranged by the Spirit of God with a definite object in view.

It was given to Isaiah to prophesy of Messiah as the suffering servant of Jehovah (**Isaiah 52** and 53). Moses predicted the raising up of a prophet whose word on all questions would be final (**Deuteronomy 18:15-19**). Mark was the evangelist chosen by the Holy Spirit to portray our Lord fulfilling these two offices of servant and prophet. But we are not to suppose that this means other aspects of His nature and character were ignored. He was never more kingly than when serving, nor more divine than when He willingly limited Himself.

Peter the Great, after he had built up the Russian empire at high cost, decided he must have a navy. But no one in Russia knew the art of shipbuilding. So Peter vacated his throne for a time, appointed his consort Catherine as regent, laid aside his royal apparel, dressed as a common laborer, and journeyed to Holland and England where he learned the art himself. He worked in the shipyards side by side with

men who little dreamed of the dignity of the apparently uncouth artisan who toiled with them day by day. Peter was no less an emperor when he wrought with hammer and adz than when he returned to his throne.

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## **Mark's Background**

John Mark was the son of a wealthy woman named Mary, probably a widow, whose home was large enough to serve as a meeting place for many of the early disciples after the Pentecostal outpouring (**Acts 12:12**).

Mark accompanied Barnabas (to whom he was related) and Paul to Cyprus, but later returned to Jerusalem, much to the displeasure of Paul (**Acts 12:25**; 13:13; 15:37-39). Later, however, Mark redeemed himself and became a trusted minister of Christ and companion of Paul and Peter (**2 Timothy 4:11**; **1 Peter 5:13**). It is like God to select the onetime unfaithful servant Mark to tell the story of the ever-faithful Servant, God's own blessed Son!

According to a well-known tradition of the early church, Mark was referring to himself when he told the story of "a certain young man" who followed Christ right up to His entry into the house of the high priest. When the guards sought to lay hold of Mark, he left the linen cloth that had enswathed his body in their hands and fled from them naked (**Mark 14:51-52**). The fact that no other evangelist records this incident perhaps may not be sufficient grounds for connecting it with Mark himself. On the other hand, because of its wide acceptance in early days it may possibly be the truth. In that case it would imply that young John Mark had listened to the teaching of the Lord while He was in Jerusalem. Mark's heart had gone out to Jesus so much that he thought he was ready even to die with Him, but in the hour of testing Mark fled, as did the other disciples. How many there are who really love the Lord and yet lack that

moral courage that enables them to go through with Him at all costs!

As we think of this fine young man and the difficulties he faced in getting started in the service of the Lord, let us remember that later on he proved himself an efficient minister of Christ. May we be encouraged to rise above our own fears and shortcomings, counting on God to make us true ambassadors of the gospel of His Son.

As we study the record of Him who said, "I am among you as he that serveth" (**Luke 22:27**), may our own hearts be bowed in lowly subjection before Him. Let us yield ourselves unto the One now risen from the dead, that we may serve in the same lowly spirit that characterized Him when He was in this world. May we be content with the approval of the Father while we pass through this life comparatively unknown and unregarded.

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## **Chapter One The Servant Begins His Ministry**

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**Henry Allen Ironside**

**Mark**

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### **John Prepares the Crowds (Mark 1:1-13)**

Mark began his record very abruptly as he introduced the Servant of Jehovah, and then told us in a very few words of His forerunner and of His baptism and temptation. “The gospel of Jesus Christ” is God’s good news concerning His blessed Son who came into this world to reveal His heart to mankind and to offer Himself as the great sin offering for our redemption.

Malachi had predicted the coming of the messenger who was to precede the Lord and prepare the people for His advent. This messenger was the voice crying in the wilderness (**Isaiah 40:3**) calling on Israel to prepare the way of the Lord and make His paths straight. The word rendered “Lord” in **Mark 1:3** is really “Jehovah” in the Old Testament passage. So we have here a clear affirmation of the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who came in such meekness and lowliness was the everlasting One who had condescended to unite His deity with our humanity, apart from its sin. He came to be our kinsman-redeemer and purchased our deliverance from sin’s bondage and the judgment to which we were exposed.

John came baptizing those who confessed their sins and thus professed repentance. He baptized them in the wilderness of Judea, immersing them in the turbulent waters of the Jordan, the river that symbolized death. Multitudes went out to him from all the surrounding and

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contiguous territory and responded to his message. Their baptism was not in any sense a meritorious act, but it was the acknowledgment that they accepted the message and admitted their need of cleansing and forgiveness. We know from **John 1:29** that these penitents were directed to the Lamb of God as the only One who could take away the sin of the world and thus make it possible for guilty sinners to become reconciled to God.

John was an Elijah-like character: a stern and serious man who dwelled in the wilderness and lived the life of an ascetic, subsisting on locusts and wild honey. He did not seek to draw attention to himself but proclaimed, "There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose."

John declared that when Christ appeared He would baptize with the Holy Spirit those who received Him. This we know was fulfilled on Pentecost and afterward when the risen Christ "shed forth" the gift of the Holy Spirit, who baptized believers into one body and anointed them for service.

Next we read that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized of John in the Jordan. Mark did not tell us of John's objection and how this was overcome by the Lord's explanation. We read of this in **Matthew 3:13-15**. The baptism of Jesus was our Lord's pledge to carry on to completion the work He had come from Heaven to perform. His pledge was ratified in Heaven, and Jesus was publicly consecrated to this service when there came a voice from above saying, "Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." He who had been baptized, thereby identifying Himself with confessed sinners, was declared to be the sinless One.

We have no details in Mark of the temptation, or testing, of

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Jehovah's Servant. We are told only that *immediately* (note the word, for it will be found often in this Gospel) the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness, that He stayed there with the wild beasts for forty days, and that He was tempted by the devil. I take it that the Holy Spirit moved Jesus to go into the wilderness in order to be tested. As man on earth He chose to be under the Spirit's direction in all things. It was fitting that He should be tested before He began His gracious ministry. His temptation was not to see if perchance He might fail and sin in the hour of stress, but rather to prove that He would not fail, because He was the absolutely sinless One. Those who impute to Jesus either a sinful nature or the possibility of sinning do Him a grievous wrong. Scripture guards against any such misconceptions when it tells us that He "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet *without sin*"—or literally, apart from sin (**Hebrews 4:15**, italics added). There was in Him no inward tendency to sin. The temptations were all from without and found no response whatever in His heart.

When Satan left Him, angels came and ministered to Him. He was their Creator, and they delighted to serve Him in His humiliation.

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### **Jesus Calls His First Disciples (Mark 1:14-20)**

After Herod had placed John the Baptist in confinement (in the prison of Machaerus according to early historians), Jesus, following a brief stay in Judea, went up into Galilee (**John 4:3**). There He began His public ministry by preaching the good news that the kingdom of God had come. Doubtlessly referring to the great time prophecy of **Daniel 9**, He exclaimed, "The time is fulfilled," and He called on all men to repent—that is, to judge themselves before God, and to believe the glad tidings.

"He saw Simon and Andrew... casting a net into the sea."

These brothers had met with Jesus a short time before, but had not then been called to leave all to follow Him (**John 1:39-42**). Now they had reached a crisis in their lives when they must make a great decision. Observe that it was the Lord Jesus, not they, who took the initiative (**John 15:16**).

“Come ye after me, and I will make you... fishers of men.” It is a mistake to attempt to apply these words to all disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. He selected these two, and others later, in a special way for a great soulwinning ministry. But we may be assured that all who follow Him faithfully will be used of Him in some way that would not be true otherwise.

“Straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him.” Their hearts had already been won for Him. Now, when the call came for fulltime public service, there was no hesitancy. It is true they had not much to leave, but for His name’s sake they turned from whatever they had in the way of earthly prospects, and He made them valiant and competent workmen in the great task of winning souls to Himself.

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were also fishermen, and John at least had known Jesus before. Possibly James had known Him also. It is evident that the Lord Jesus Christ recognized their fervency of spirit and the devotion of their hearts to Himself.

“Straightway he called them: and they left their father... and went after him.” This was a real test. They doubtless loved their father Zebedee intensely, but they put Christ and His claims first, and so forsook home and business for His sake. Think what Peter, Andrew, John, and James would have missed if they had failed to heed the command to leave all for Christ’s sake. They gave up the fishing

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business to engage in the greatest work ever committed to man— winning souls for Christ.

The Lord called the four fishermen to become fishers of men. He saw that they were expert at and diligent in their work on the sea of Galilee, and He called and equipped them for the higher and nobler service of winning souls for Himself. We are not to conclude from this that all who follow the Lord Jesus Christ will become great soul-winners. Some are called to serve in much humbler capacities. Some have no ability to preach, or even to do effective personal work. But each one is called to serve in whatever place the Lord puts him. Some are called just to suffer for His sake. All can participate in the ministry of prayer and thereby be a real help to those who preach the Word.

Just how much time elapsed between the calling of the four fishermen-apostles and the activities recorded in the rest of **Mark 1**, we can only conjecture. It would seem that all occurred within a very few days.

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### **Jesus Casts Out Demons (Mark 1:21-28)**

“They went into Capernaum.” Our Lord and His mother and brethren had moved from Nazareth to Capernaum, and to Jesus it was therefore home (**Matthew 4:13; John 2:12**). It is called “his own city” (**Matthew 9:1**). Here He taught frequently and performed many miracles. It was a city privileged above all others in Galilee; yet it rejected His testimony and against it He pronounced one of His most solemn woes (**Matthew 11:23**).

“Straightway on the sabbath day.” Punctiliously Jesus observed the sabbath of the law in the way God intended that it should be kept. But He refused to recognize the mass of traditions and legalistic additions to the

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Scriptures that the rabbis had connected with the sabbath. The rabbis had made burdensome what was intended for blessing. The synagogue was open to Him as a recognized teacher, and He entered into it and taught.

*The Synagogue in Israel.* The first mention of a synagogue in Scripture is in **Psalms 74:8** (kjv). The last is in **Revelation 3:9**, where we read of a synagogue of Satan. The word itself just means a place of gathering or assembling together. Unlike the temple, which was divinely appointed, the synagogue was a voluntary display of loyalty to the law of God. The Jews felt the need of such places where they might come together for instruction and fellowship. There was but one recognized temple at any given time, and that was in Jerusalem. There were synagogues wherever there were enough Jewish families to maintain them, and often several were in one city.

As a child Jesus was accustomed to attend the synagogue. He began early to participate in its services (**Luke 4:16**). Note the words, “as his custom was.” He honored the place where the Word of God was read and expounded, and commanded others to honor the synagogue too, even though those who taught there were not always men of consistent lives (**Matthew 23:2-3**). May we not learn from Him to respect the place where God’s name is recognized and His Word read, even though we may not endorse all that goes on there? We are so prone to go to extremes, either showing utter indifference to evil doctrine or unholy behavior, or taking a supercilious and self-righteous attitude toward all who do not meet our standards. It is important to realize that while we as individuals are exhorted to cease to do evil and learn to do well (**Isaiah 1:16-17**), we are not called to ascend the judgment seat and censure others who may be as sincere as we, but do not see everything just as we do.

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“He taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes.” These men were accustomed to repeat what their teachers had said, and did not attempt to give any authoritative instructions themselves. Jesus spoke as One sent from God. He did not need to bolster His instructions with quotations from human authorities, but preached the Word as the mouthpiece of the Father, whose representative He was. This was teaching such as the people had never heard before.

“A man with an unclean spirit.” The Scriptures plainly tell us of the reality of demon possession. This was not just a Jewish superstition. On this occasion the service was interrupted by a man under the control of a wicked and unclean spirit.

“I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God.” The demon recognized the person and authority of Jesus and feared lest He was about to judge the evil spirits by confining them in the eternal prison house of the damned. Men might be incredulous regarding Christ’s claims, but fallen spirits know Him for who He is.

“Jesus rebuked him.” Our Lord did not desire testimony from demons. He commanded the spirit to be silent and to come out of the frenzied man. With a last vengeful effort, the demon inflicted further suffering on his poor victim, and then in unwilling obedience to the command that he was powerless to disobey, he left the man free from his awful power. The deliverance was evident to all present.

Those who filled the synagogue were thrilled when they recognized the power of Jesus over evil spirits. They questioned one another as to the meaning of it all and the source of His authority. Never before, as they had listened

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a demonstration of divine approval. One told another of the remarkable thing that had taken place in the synagogue of Capernaum, until the news had penetrated all that part of Galilee. But, as after-events proved, it is one thing to recognize in Jesus a great teacher, prophet, or wonderworker, and it is quite another thing to bow in repentance before God and receive the Savior He has sent, as the Redeemer from sin.

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### **Jesus Heals Many (Mark 1:29-34)**

Originally Simon and Andrew had lived in Bethsaida. It may have been after Simon's marriage that he moved to Capernaum, possibly to share the home of his wife's mother.

"Simon's wife's mother lay sick of a fever." Everywhere Jesus went there were evidences of the havoc sin had wrought in Israel. Had this people been faithful to God, He would have taken sickness away from them (**Exodus 15:26**). But as a nation they had failed to obey His Word. Consequently sickness and disease were everywhere prevalent. Seeing the suffering of Simon's mother-in-law, the disciples called Jesus' attention to her, confident that He would relieve the situation.

In tender personal consideration for the poor sufferer, He took her hand and gently raised her up and "the fever left her." There was healing in His touch. His hand calmed and soothed her and brought deliverance from the fire that burned in her veins. In loving gratitude she who had lain there so helplessly, now arose and ministered to others.

As the day drew to a close, a motley crowd could be seen coming from every side, bringing the diseased and demoniacs that Jesus might administer His healing power on their behalf. "All the city was gathered together at the

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door. "This is not mere hyperbole. Capernaum was not a large city. From every quarter its inhabitants went to the house of Simon and Andrew, impelled either by curiosity or a sense of need. Alas, the great majority of them never considered seriously their responsibility to Him who had come among them in the activity of His grace not only to heal their bodies, but also to proclaim salvation for their souls.

He healed many of their physical infirmities and delivered others from spiritual bondage to demon power, but He refused to allow the wicked spirits to declare His identity, for He would not receive testimony from the hosts of the evil one.

The sabbath on which so many were healed in Capernaum (**Mark 1:21-34**) may have been the sabbath immediately following the day of the miraculous draught of fishes (**Luke 5:1-11**). The life of our Lord on earth was one of ceaseless service. This does not imply that He was actively engaged always in teaching and healing. He found abundant time for quiet communion with the Father. Yet none of His disciples were so busily engaged as He.

The sabbath day in Capernaum is but a cross section of His entire life, which was spent in proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and meeting the needs of men and women. The Father anointed Him with the Holy Spirit so that He might go about doing good and healing all that were oppressed of the devil (**Acts 10:38**) as a testimony to the divine interest in human concerns. In all this ministry He has left us an example. We waste so much time on things that do not profit. He made every moment count for the glory of God. In our lives there is so much that is of no real and lasting value. In all He said or did there was a worthwhileness that counted for eternity.

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The teaching and healing ministries of the Lord Jesus Christ were ever intimately connected. The latter complemented the former, and in a sense authenticated it. His works of power proved that He was the Son of God, the Messiah of Israel and the Savior of the world. He performed no useless miracles, no merely spectacular wonders. He was not a magician seeking to astonish people by His mystic power over the elements or the minds of men. In all that He did He had in view the Father's glory and the blessing of mankind. He recognized all diseases, every physical infirmity, as primarily the work of the enemy of God and man, inasmuch as there would have been no sickness in the world if sin had not come in to mar God's fair creation. It was His prerogative to undo the work of Satan and to free sufferers from the effects of sin, both spiritually and physically. He gave to Israel a foretaste of the blessing to become universal when the kingdom of God is set up and mankind is delivered from the bondage of corruption (**Romans 8:20-21**).

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### **Jesus Cleanses the Leper (Mark 1:35-45)**

Following that busy sabbath in Capernaum the servant-Savior withdrew Himself a great while before sunrise into a solitary place and there spent some hours in hallowed communion with His Father. Prayer was to Him, as man in perfection, the very delight of His holy soul as He talked things over with Him who had sent Him.

As the morning advanced, Simon and others of the disciples came seeking Him. When they found Him, they told Him that there were many others desiring to see and hear Him. It was their thought evidently to recognize Him as King and endeavor to force the issue, as it were, of a break with the Roman government. But for Christ there could be no kingdom without the cross. So instead of

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going to greet those who sought Him, He quietly said, "Let us go into the next towns." He intimated that He had a ministry to fulfill in connection with the residents of other towns, for He had been sent to preach the gospel of the kingdom to them also. Therefore, the little party went on from town to town throughout all Galilee, and He preached in the synagogues and cast out demons.

As He was ministering in one of these places, a poor unclean leper came to Him. The leper fell down at His feet and asked to be healed of the dread disease. He was sure Jesus had power, but did not know if He was willing to use it for one so definitely under the curse of God, for such was the recognized status of a leper in Israel. He cried, "If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." With a heart filled with compassion Jesus turned to him in grace, and not fearing possible defilement by contact with one so unclean, He put forth His hand and touched the leper. Jesus exclaimed, "I will; be thou clean." Instantly the miracle was wrought. The leprosy fled away at the command of Jesus, and the former victim of this terrible disease departed rejoicing. Jesus, who had no desire to be hailed simply as a mighty wonderworker, charged the healed man to tell no one of what had taken place. The Lord ordered the man to go first to the priest in the temple at Jerusalem, and there show himself for an examination and offer the two birds and other sacrifices that Moses had commanded, as recorded in **Leviticus 14**, "for a testimony unto them." One can imagine the wonder and amazement of the priest as this man presented himself for ceremonial cleansing, for such a healing was something unheard-of in Israel for centuries.

The healed man could not refrain from proclaiming abroad what he had experienced; and as a result so many crowded to see Jesus that He left the city and remained

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out in the country. Even there they came to Him from every quarter. It was not in human power to heal leprosy, but what no physician on earth could do Jesus had accomplished by a touch and a word! Leprosy was a constitutional disease. It worked outward from within. Because of its filthiness it is used by God as a picture of the uncleanness of sin.

Every unsaved soul is afflicted with this dread disease and is an unclean sinner in the sight of God. A man was not a leper because he had horrible ulcers and other sores on his body. These were but evidences of the disease within. And a man is not a sinner because he sins: he sins because he is a sinner, and as such he is corrupt constitutionally. Only the power of the Lord can give deliverance.

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## **Conclusion**

In the first five chapters of Mark we are called on to consider the response made by various persons to the call and testimony of the Lord during His ministry on earth. Some heard with gladness His gracious invitation to be with Him as disciples and messengers, and readily abandoned all their ordinary vocations for love of Him. Others were hesitant and fearful lest too much might be involved in subjecting themselves to His yoke. Some sought Him out because of their personal needs, whether physical or spiritual; others followed Him believing He was the promised Messiah and desiring to have a part with Him in His kingdom. But whatever the motive that led them to cleave to Him, He received them. Then He patiently instructed them, unfolding the real meaning of His mission and of that kingdom of God which it was the "Father's good pleasure to give" them (**Luke 12:32**). It was the Father who drew men to the Lord Jesus, and so there

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was a welcome for all who came (**John 6:44**).

The welcome of the heavenly Father is just as true today. One may come to Him because his heart is broken and he has learned that Jesus Christ heals broken hearts; another comes because of a yearning that he has sought in vain to satisfy in this poor world; another comes bowed down with shame and grief because of a wicked, wasted life; and yet another comes because he has heard that there is joy and gladness to be found in Christ. But all who come are taken up in grace and given a royal reception. All must come as sinners though, for it is only such He came to call (**Matthew 9:13**).

Our Lord has no stereotyped way of dealing with souls. He reveals Himself by many different means and works, according to the special needs of each individual. The great thing is that the conscience be reached and the heart drawn to Him. Whatever the reason one may have for coming to Jesus, he can be certain that he will not be turned away. The Lord values loving devotion to Himself.

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## Henry Allen Ironside

### Mark

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#### Healing of the Palsied Man (Mark 2:1-12)

The Lord's early Galilean ministry was still in progress, the events of **Mark 2** following closely upon those of **Mark 1**. Capernaum was the center from which Jesus worked out to other parts of Galilee in the early summer or late spring of a.d. 28.

The presence of Jesus in any particular place soon became known, as on this occasion when the word went out that the great healer was again in the city that He had chosen for His home. Crowds filled the house where He was staying and pressed about the door as He proclaimed the message He had come from Heaven to deliver, the word of the kingdom. This was His chief mission during His three and a half years of ministry. Healing sick bodies was secondary, though to the people it doubtless seemed to be the most important. But sickness of the soul is far more serious than physical ill-health, and to bring to men the message of life is far more important than delivering them from bodily ailments.

"One sick of the palsy, which was borne of four." Without help, this poor helpless paralytic could not make his way to Jesus, but he had four friends who were apparently firmly convinced that the Lord would give strength to the palsied limbs of the sick man. These energetic friends were determined not to fail in their endeavor to bring the afflicted sufferer directly to the wonderworking, compassionate Savior. Since they found all ordinary access to Jesus blocked by the crowd surging about the door, they carried him up onto the flat roof, generally reached by an outside stairway. There they lifted off the tiles and thatching and made a space so

large that by passing cords under the pallet on which the paralytic lay, they could let the sick one down to where Jesus was teaching. One can imagine the stir and excitement of the people as the reclining man was carefully lowered to the very feet of Jesus. To Him it was no rude or unwarranted intrusion or interruption, but mute evidence of the faith of the five, who counted on Him to exercise His power on their behalf.

“When Jesus saw their faith.” Faith is evidenced by works. The four friends of the helpless man showed their faith by their works. Their persistence and energy demonstrated the reality of their faith in Jesus’ readiness to meet the need. Assured that their sick friend needed Jesus, they were determined that nothing would prevent his coming into the Savior’s presence. Are we as much concerned about bringing our unconverted friends to Jesus as they were? It was a joy to Christ when He saw the faith of these men, for faith always glorifies God. He recognizes its presence in every honest, seeking soul and is ever quick to respond to the desire of the believing heart. He recognized the faith of the friends, and seeing that the paralytic needed something far greater than healing of the body—namely, the forgiveness of his sins—“He said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.” It was a dramatic moment, and His words must have amazed the listeners, for never had they known man to speak like this.

“Certain of the scribes...reasoning in their hearts.” These were legalists who knew nothing of grace and who denied the claims of Jesus to be the Son of the Father. They did not go to the Scriptures for light, but they debated among themselves what it could all mean. Filled with prejudice and determined not to believe in Jesus, they at once took issue with Him. To them it was the rankest kind of blasphemy for anyone to pretend to have authority to forgive sins. This

prerogative belonged to God alone. They did not know that God revealed in flesh stood in their midst!

“Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves.” They did not speak aloud, thus audibly expressing their indignation and objection to His words, but Jesus knew their thoughts (**Psalm 94:11**) and He answered them accordingly. “Why reason ye...in your hearts?” To be able thus to read the inmost secrets of their thought-life was another evidence of deity, for only God knows our thoughts “afar off” (**Psalm 139:2**).

“Whether is it easier?” So far as they were concerned, they could no more heal the sick than forgive the sinner. Jesus could do both. He chose to do the more important first.

“That ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins.” He would perform a miracle to reveal His authority to deliver from both sin and its effects. He therefore turned to the still helpless paralytic and commanded him to rise up and carry his bed—a pallet easily rolled together—and return healed to his home. There was power in His word. As He spoke, strength came to those limbs and the man arose, to the astonishment of all who were looking on.

The palsied man had been literally “without strength” (**Romans 5:6**). In his weakness he pictures all men in their sins. The word of Christ spoke strength into his paralyzed limbs, just as that same word gives new life to the one who receives it in faith.

As the people saw the paralytic rise to his feet and go away carrying his bed at the command of Jesus, they realized that divine power was active in their midst, and they gave God the glory for working so wondrously through His servant Jesus. Doubtless many wondered if He were not indeed the promised Messiah as they exclaimed, “We never saw it on

this fashion.” It was a new and striking exhibition of the grace and power of God.

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### **Calling of Matthew (Mark 2:13-17)**

Leaving the house where He had healed the palsied man, Jesus “went forth again by the sea side,” and there taught the multitude who followed Him. He revealed to them the great truths connected with the forthcoming kingdom of God, for which Israel had waited so long.

“He saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the receipt of custom.” Levi, otherwise called Matthew (**Matthew 9:9-13**), the author of the first Gospel, was a member of the despised publican class. He was one of the tax-gatherers in the service of Rome. They were hated because they farmed the taxes, grinding down their Jewish brothers to enrich themselves. At Capernaum there was a Roman customhouse, where all the fishermen had to bring their catches and pay a certain percent as tax. Levi was perhaps connected with this office. Evidently he had heard Jesus before and was convinced in his heart that He was the Messiah; so when the call came, he responded immediately. There was instant surrender to the claims of Christ. We see in the ready obedience of Levi, an example of what should be characteristic of all whose hearts have been won by Christ.

Christ is not only our Savior. He is also our Lord. Redemption involves much more than salvation from the guilt of and the judgment due to sin. Redemption includes our deliverance from the power and authority of Satan, the god of this world, and our glad subjection to the One who has purchased us with His own precious blood. We read, “Ye are not your own... ye are bought with a price” (**1 Corinthians 6:19-20**). Because of this, we are to acknowledge the Lord Jesus as the supreme Master of our lives. Gratitude to Him for all His grace has done would in

itself demand our wholehearted recognition of His dominion over us. We are not saved by following Jesus, but because we are saved we are exhorted to follow Him.

Loyalty to Christ demands that we surrender our wills to His and seek to glorify Him in all our ways. We often hear it said that our wills must be broken, but that is poor psychology and worse theology. A broken-willed man is no longer capable of making definite decisions. Tennyson wrote, "Our wills are ours, / To make them Thine." And this is what Scripture emphasizes. We are voluntarily to yield our wills to Him who has given Himself for us, that our service may be the glad, happy obedience of those who delight in the will of God above all else. We need to beware of calling Jesus "Lord" if we are slighting His commands. It is by obedience that we prove our love for Him (**John 14:15**), as did Levi.

As he began his new career, Levi made a feast to which he invited many of his former friends and Jesus and His disciples. It was his way of testifying to the new allegiance, and this testimony must have made a great impression on his old associates.

"The scribes and Pharisees saw him [Jesus] eat with publicans and sinners." In the eyes of these religious formalists this was a very serious offense. But it showed how little they understood the nature of the mission of Jesus. As a physician ministers to the sick rather than to the well, so Christ came to bring the message of grace to needy sinners rather than to seek out those who fancied they were already good enough for God. Actually, "there is none righteous" (**Romans 3:10**), but there are many who pride themselves on a righteousness they do not really possess. For such there is no blessing. It is the confessed sinner who finds mercy.

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### **Defending His Disciples (Mark 2:18-22)**



A question arose concerning fasting. Jesus took occasion to open up important truth in this connection. It was the disciples of John and those of the Pharisees, the orthodox party in Judaism, who raised the question as to why the disciples of Jesus did not follow their example in regard to fasting. Both groups evidently thought of refraining from food at certain times as meritorious, or at least advantageous in producing holiness of heart and life. It seemed therefore to them that Christ's disciples, in this respect at least, moved on a lower plane than they. Jesus answered them by putting a question: "Can the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? as long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast." Jesus was saying that there was no occasion for His followers to mourn before God and to afflict their souls while He Himself, the source of all blessing, was with them. But Jesus foretold the time when He, the bridegroom, would be taken away from them, and then they would fast in a very real sense. Their fasting would be characterized by abstinence from the follies of the world—that world which was to be arrayed against them in bitter opposition to the teachings of their Master.

Moreover, those who raised the question about fasting did not realize that Jesus had come to introduce an altogether new order. We are told elsewhere that the law was given by Moses—and there was much in the law that had to do with fasting—but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. It was not in accordance with His program to call men and women to subject themselves to legal principles. To do so would be but to attempt to sew a piece of new cloth on an old garment, which would only result in making the tear worse. Or it would be like putting new wine into old skin bottles; when the wine began to ferment, the bottles would burst and the wine would be lost. It is not possible to put the new wine of grace into the forms and enactments of the law; the one

necessarily nullifies the other. As we read in **Romans 11:6**, “And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.” By His answer our Lord clearly distinguished between the legality of the past and the grace He had come to reveal. This was in measure illustrated in the incident related next.

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### **Answering Questions on Sabbath Day Observance (Mark 2:23-28)**

As the disciples walked through a grainfield on the sabbath day they began to pluck some of the heads of grain, rub them in their hands, and eat the grains. This was in full accord with the provision made in the law, for God had said through Moses, “When thou comest into the standing corn of thy neighbour, then thou mayest pluck the ears with thine hand; but thou shalt not move a sickle unto thy neighbour’s standing corn” (**Deuteronomy 23:25**). But the Pharisees immediately found fault because the disciples were plucking the grain on the sabbath day, and so those legalists immediately objected.

There was nothing in the law that declared this act contrary to anything that God had commanded, but the Pharisees had added so many traditions to the law that the disciples seemed to be violating a divine precept. In reply Jesus referred to what David did when he and his men were hungry and came to the tabernacle in the days of the high priest Abiathar. David asked for food for himself and his retainers. The priest Ahimelech, the father of Abiathar, replied that they had no bread at hand except the shewbread that had been taken from the holy table and was the food of the priests (**Leviticus 24:9; 1 Samuel 21:6**). At David’s request, however, the shewbread was given to the hungry men, and no judgment followed. When God’s anointed was

rejected, it was far more important to minister to him and to the needs of his followers than to preserve punctiliously the order of the tabernacle, for after all, men are more important to God than ordinances.

After referring to David Jesus declared, "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath." With these words He was announcing His own deity, for again and again the sabbath is called "the sabbath of Jehovah." When Jesus declared Himself to be Lord of that day of rest, He definitely confessed Himself to be the God of Israel, revealed in flesh. If the Pharisees had ears to hear, they would have understood.

I do not here go into the critical question as to the expression, "in the days of Abiathar." This has been discussed by many, and perhaps it will never be fully explained until we know even as we are known. We should remember that it would be a simple matter for some copyist to substitute by mistake "Abiathar" for "Ahimelech." On the other hand, there may be some divine reason for setting the father to one side and recognizing the son as the rightful high priest at that time.

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## **Conclusion**

We have noticed already that our Lord performed miracles in order to relieve human misery and to authenticate His messiahship. We would also emphasize the precious truth that these miracles were intended to reveal to men: the grace and tender compassion of God. Through Christ God demonstrated His deep concern for those who had brought such dire trouble and affliction on themselves by turning away from Him. The entire human race was suffering because of sin. Israel in particular had been promised immunity from disease if obedient to the law of God (**Exodus 23:25**). Every blind, deaf, crippled, or diseased person

among them was a witness to Israel's failure in this respect (**Deuteronomy 28:15ff.**). In healing the sick, Jesus was undoing the work of the devil (**Acts 10:38**) and fulfilling what had been predicted concerning the Servant of Jehovah, Israel's promised Messiah-King (**Isaiah 35:4-6**). When Jesus was on earth proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, it was specially fitting that the blessings of the coming age should be revealed. Through Christ's ministry the people were given a sample of what Israel and the whole world will enjoy in its fullness when God's King reigns on mount Zion and blessing goes out to all the earth.

Physical healing and forgiveness of sins were intimately connected in the Old Testament (**Psalms 103:3**; **Psalm 67:2**; **Isaiah 58:8**). This connection between healing and forgiveness was equally true in our Lord's earthly ministry, as **Mark 2:1-12** makes clear. John prayed for Gaius that physical health and prosperity of soul might go hand in hand (**3 John 2**). And there is a sense in which the connection is still true, even though our blessings now are spiritual (**Ephesians 1:3**) rather than temporal. Where physical health does not accompany spiritual health, we may be assured it is because God our Father is working out some hidden purpose of blessing. But we are always free to pray for one another that we may be healed (**James 5:16**).

Every form of disease healed by our Lord Jesus seems to picture some aspect of sin, which is like a fever burning in the soul, a leprosy polluting the whole being, a palsy making one utterly unable to take a step toward God, and a withered hand incapable of true service. Whatever form sin may take, Jesus can give complete deliverance from it.

All healing is divine, whether it be by miraculous power, by means of properly controlled physical habits, diet, and exercise, or by direct medical treatment. It is God alone who

can give renewed health and strength. He whose power brought us into being and gave us these marvelous bodies with all their wonderful functions, is the only One who can keep us well or restore us from illness.

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## **Chapter Three The Work Of The Divine Servant Part Two**

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### **Jesus Heals on the Sabbath (Mark 3:1-6)**

Again we find the Lord in conflict with the Pharisees as to the sabbath question. His declaration that the sabbath was God's gracious provision for man's comfort—never intended to add to man's burdens but rather to relieve them—had made no impression on these stern and crafty legalists.

Among the congregation in the synagogue service on this particular sabbath was a poor, helpless man with a withered hand—that is, a hand that had become paralyzed and hung uselessly by his side. Jesus' critics, knowing the compassion of His heart took it for granted that He would take an interest in this man. Instead of rejoicing in this evidence of divine love and consideration, they watched Him with jealous eyes to see if He would exercise His healing power on the sabbath. They secretly hoped He would, so they could accuse Him of violating the tradition of the elders. Such is the heart of man, even though outwardly pious and religious, when a stranger to the grace of God!

Jesus, to whom nothing was hidden and who read their minds like an open book, asked the partially paralyzed man to "stand forth." One can imagine how eagerly and hopefully he would obey, expectantly looking to Jesus for the healing of his infirmity.

Then the Lord asked the question, "Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill?" No one answered. Knowing their hypocrisy He looked on them with anger. It was holy indignation because of their pretense to honor God and their indifference to the needs

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of men. The hardness of their hearts grieved the tender spirit of Jesus.

He then commanded the man to stretch out his hand. At once, as he looked in faith to Jesus, he felt new life pulsating through that paralyzed limb, and he stretched it out and found it was now as well and strong as the other.

One might have thought that such an exhibition of the grace and power that was in Jesus would have filled every heart with gladness and led to praise and thanksgiving to God for having visited His people so wonderfully. But the miracle had the very opposite effect on these jealous advocates of human traditions as opposed to divine revelation. They exhibited an utter lack of conscience toward God while displaying a punctilious concern for the observance of their traditions and false conceptions of the will of God regarding the observance of the weekly sabbath. The Pharisees, stern champions of orthodoxy that they were, entered into collaboration with the Herodians, the worldly and corrupt politicians of their day. Both groups wanted to lay hold of Jesus and put Him out of the way. Thus did extremes meet then, as often since. Men of entirely opposite views agreed on the rejection of Christ and consulted each other about how He might be destroyed. Such is the inevitable evil of the natural heart in its opposition to God!

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### **Jesus Heals Multitudes (Mark 3:7-12)**

We are told that Jesus withdrew Himself and that with His disciples He returned to the shore of the sea of Galilee. Learning of His whereabouts, great crowds assembled. They came not only from Galilee itself but also from Judea, from as far southeast as Idumaea (the land of Edom), and from as far northwest as the regions of Tyre and Sidon. The fame of Jesus had spread far abroad. It was a time of

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expectation and speculative ferment among the Jewish people everywhere, who confidently looked for the predicted appearance of the long-desired Son of David who was to bring liberty and salvation to Israel. The hope that Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth, might be the Messiah evidently was in the hearts of the multitudes that came from near and far to hear His words and to behold His works of power.

So dense was the crowd that they pressed upon Jesus as He stood on the narrow beach. He therefore asked of one of His disciples (Peter, we know from other records) for the privilege of using his fishing boat, which was anchored offshore, as a pulpit. Standing in this little ship He addressed the people who hung avidly on His words. The hills rise from the shore in that particular section of the coast of the little inland sea like a vast amphitheater so that the voice of the speaker would be heard readily by thousands.

Many sick ones were in that crowd, and after finishing His discourse Jesus healed all who came. So great was their faith in His healing power that they stretched forth eager hands, believing that to touch even His garments would bring the deliverance for which they longed. None were disappointed. Even those possessed with demons were freed from their bondage, the evil spirits proclaiming the truth of His deity. But He did not look with favor on audible recognition from these vile powers, and so commanded them to refrain from acknowledging Him in this way.

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### **Jesus Ordains the Twelve (Mark 3:13-21)**

From among the many who had become disciples of Jesus He chose twelve who were to be intimately associated with Him. With one unhappy exception, they were destined to

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become His witnesses after His death and resurrection.

“He ordained twelve... that he might send them forth to preach.” It is not men who choose or appoint themselves to be servants of Christ. He chooses and ordains His own (**John 15:16**). All of the twelve apostles were what we might call “hand-picked men” (even Judas), being the special objects of divine interest. Helpless in themselves, the twelve were empowered by the Lord to do mighty works in order to accredit the message they were to carry to Israel.

The name of Simon, whom the Lord surnamed Peter, stands alone in verse 16. He was in some respects the prince of the apostles. His warm, energetic nature and fervency of spirit fitted him in a special way for leadership after he was endued with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. His ministry, as we know, was to the Jews particularly, although it was he who also opened the door of faith to the Gentiles by proclaiming the gospel in the house of Cornelius. Jesus surnamed him “a stone.”

Next in order are “James the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James; and he surnamed them Boanerges.” When Jesus gave a new name to anyone, it indicated some characteristic He saw in him or which He was to produce in him in days to come. *Boanerges* is interpreted for us as “sons of thunder.” These young men were evidently of an electric disposition, easily stirred to quick judgments, and likely to be committed readily to decisive action. James was the first of the twelve to seal his testimony with his blood. John, evidently the youngest of the entire group, outlived them all, and after almost incredible suffering, died a natural death at Ephesus in the last decade of the first century of the Christian era.

Andrew was the brother of Peter, and it was the former

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who led the latter to Christ, as we are told in **John 1:40-42**. The names of Philip and Bartholomew (also called Nathanael) are linked together. They were friends before they met Jesus, and it was Philip who introduced Nathanael to the Savior. Matthew, also known as Levi, had been a tax collector in the Roman customhouse at Capernaum, but left all to follow Jesus. Of Thomas' s earlier life we know nothing. He is chiefly remembered for his outspoken declaration of his doubt as to the identity of the One whom the rest declared to be the risen Christ. But when Jesus appeared a week later, Thomas was convinced and worshiped Him as his Lord and God. James and Thaddaeus (or Judas, not Iscariot) were brothers, sons of Alphaeus, and apparently cousins of Jesus. Simon the Canaanite, elsewhere distinguished as the Zealot, had belonged to a radically subversive party of Jewish patriots working secretly, and at times overtly, for the deliverance of Palestine from the Roman yoke.

The last of the list is Judas Iscariot (the man of Kerioth) who was to be doomed to eternal infamy. He seems to have been the "gentleman" of the twelve, a man of culture, appointed to be the treasurer of the little company. Judas was trusted by the rest as deserving special recognition, but he proved to be unreal and hypocritical from the very beginning. Of him Jesus said later, "One of you is a devil."

After giving us this list Mark hastened rapidly on, as it were, to tell us of the further activities of God's anointed servant. So many came to Jesus for healing and instruction that there scarcely seemed time for any physical relaxation on His part. He was kept so busy that neither He nor the twelve had leisure even to take their ordinary meals quietly and restfully. His friends—by that is meant His immediate relatives—actually feared for His

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dissuade Him from further service for a while at least. But He allowed none to interfere with the work He had come to do.

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### **Jesus Warns of the Unpardonable Sin (Mark 3:22-30)**

As the multitudes watched the miracles Jesus performed, certain scribes, religious leaders who had come up from Jerusalem, looked on with envy and jealousy. Observing His growing power over the minds of the populace, the leaders feared for their own prestige and authority. Even when demons departed from their victims, exorcised by His word, the scribes and Pharisees refused to believe that the Spirit of God was working in and through Jesus thus accrediting Him as the promised Messiah. Deliberately they declared, "He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils [demons] casteth he out devils [demons]"! The statement was an evidence of the utter hardness of their hearts and their complete rejection of His testimony. In declaring the work of the Holy Spirit to be that of the prince of the demons, the scribes crossed the deadline. Their hearts were hardened, and the day of repentance for them had passed.

This is what some have designated "the unpardonable sin." Actually there is no sin that is unpardonable if men repent and turn in faith to Christ. But it is possible to sin so that the conscience becomes seared as with a hot iron. Men then lose all desire to repent and are given up to strong delusion; believing a lie, they are doomed to eternal perdition. It was so with these scribes. They had refused every witness God had given to the truth as set forth in Jesus.

The Lord exposed the wickedness and foolishness of the suggestion that He had cast out demons by the aid of the prince of demons when He asked, "How can Satan cast out

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Satan?” And He declared that “if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand.” Nor could a house so divided continue. Neither was it possible to believe that Satan would rise up against himself and seek to destroy his own kingdom. To do so would mean an end of his power over mankind.

As a strong man, Satan had held the poor victims of demon possession in bondage for years until the stronger One came to bind him with His word and so spoil his house. To refuse the Holy Spirit’s testimony was to show that one allied himself completely with Satan in this great conflict. Therefore Jesus added solemnly, “Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme: but he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation.” The scribes committed blasphemy by saying, “He hath an unclean spirit.”

**Mark 3:28-29** was never intended to torment anxious souls honestly desiring to know Christ, but the verses stand out as a blazing beacon warning of the danger of persisting in the rejection of the Spirit’s testimony of Christ until the seared conscience no longer responds to the gospel message.

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### **Jesus Introduces a New Family (Mark 3:31-35)**

Even the mother of Jesus evidently had not yet fully understood the nature and destiny of her miraculously conceived Son. She and other relatives of Jesus stood on the outskirts of the crowd and sent a messenger bidding Him come to them. In His answer the Lord showed how all merely natural relationships were to be superseded by those of a spiritual character. He asked, “Who is my mother, or my brethren?” Then looking around at the

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eager faces of those who were listening earnestly to His words He exclaimed, “Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother.” Thus Jesus emphasized the great truth that He had told Nicodemus: “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (**John 3:6**). The new birth, demonstrated by obedience to the Word, brings one into everlasting relationship to our Lord Jesus Christ.

As we continue to read about the work of the divine servant, we observe that under the guidance of the Holy Spirit Mark was not led to record the events in the life and ministry of Jesus in their exact chronological order. Rather in a beautiful moral order, Mark linked together certain facts and teachings that emphasize outstanding principles.

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