

Forgiven

Jesus is casting out demons, healing the sick, and has called Peter, Andrew, James, and John. They leave everything to follow Jesus. They have the blessing of walking by His side, seeing the Christ in action, and catching men.

Note: I've enjoyed and recommend Mark E. Moore's "The Chronological Life of Christ." Some of my comments can be found in his material by coincidence (he's not the only one making such observations articulated in his material), and other times, I've leaned on his accurate and helpful observations. He's done an excellent job making 1st-century culture and practices available.

I Will; Be Clean (12-16)

- At this point, Mark tells us how Jesus is preaching in synagogues and healing all about Galilee. News about Him is spreading, and people from all over Palestine are coming to follow Jesus.
- Life as a leper was lonely and difficult. Read Leviticus 13-14 to have a better understanding. Yet, you'll notice that life difficulties often produce the most humble on earth. Mark tells us that Jesus was filled with compassion for this man.
- From Moore: *"Wrapped in mourner's garb the leper passed by, his cry 'Unclean!' was to incite others to pray for him - but also to avoid him. No one was even to salute him; his bed was to be low, inclining towards the ground. If he even put his head into a place, it became unclean. No less a distance than four cubits (six feet) must be kept from a leper; or if the wind came from that direction, a hundred were scarcely sufficient. Rabbi Meir would not eat an egg purchased in a street where there was a leper. Another Rabbi boasted, that he always threw stones at them to keep them far off, while others hid themselves or ran away (Edersheim, p. 495)."*
- He doesn't say, "If you can," (which one father will say later on) Rather, "if you will." Jesus was willing because of His faith. With Jesus, it isn't "if you can," but "if you will." The challenge is believing in His power and commitment to stay by His side if He answers, "not this time." But there's something else . . .
- Life as a leper was brutal. They were unclean. Everywhere they went, anything they touched was unclean. We think about how Jesus heals by touching him. The "clean" makes the "unclean" clean again.
- Jesus seeks a desolate place (again) and prays. Brethren, Jesus didn't take advantage of His miraculous abilities to save Himself from the wilderness temptations nor will He in the garden of Gethsemane. Yet, He did take advantage of prayer. We may want to take note of it. We say, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Jesus showed that He did all things through His Father who strengthened Him. You see, brethren, Jesus was there for everyone else - like this poor leper. But who was there to truly comfort and help Jesus? No one. He truly needed time with His Father in prayer. Why? His soul needed it and the Father was actually helping Him in ways to don't understand - just like He does us.

Your Sins Are Forgiven (17-26)

- More than likely Peter's home in Capernaum.

- This poor man. Friends have to carry him everywhere. Such a person was left to beg during the day for money. He's used to being embarrassed. He knows what it is to suffer. He's already considered an outsider by his community because many times, they assumed your physical disability was due to sin.
- Jesus sees their faith. Just picture the scene as they rip through the roof.
- They're coming for healing but receive a cleansing. Would you be disappointed?
- The main point of Jesus' miracle? Jesus can forgive because He's God. Therefore, **God is in the business (forgive me) of forgiveness**. Brethren, this is the theme: forgiveness. We know who Jesus is, but we're learning what He's doing.

Follow Me (27-32)

- Levi (Jewish name), or Matthew (Aramaic name), was hated by his people. (Mark identifies him as "Levi the son of Alphaeus." Is this the brother of James the son of Alphaeus in 3:18?) Sinners and tax collectors. Prostitutes and tax collectors. Gentiles and tax collectors. Why? The Jews despised Romans taking their money, along with how they used it. The Roman rule is what they longed to be freed from. So, to work for the Romans and take your own people's money? Beyond evil! Such individuals were despised by the Jews and banned from synagogues. To eat with such a one was to be in fellowship with them in their minds. However, just because Jesus ate with sinners does not mean He approved of their sin, and he certainly did not join them in any sinful behavior.
- Mark's account states that Jesus was teaching by the sea and how the crowds were coming to Him. Then it goes on to say, "And as He passed by, He saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth," (Mark 2:14). Was Levi among the crowd before (either listening or collecting from fisherman)? We don't know, but it is something to think about.
- Levi surely was aware of Jesus. Matthew's account of Jesus' life indicates he was familiar with Jewish scripture. Matthew shares more about their culture and Jesus' fulfillment of OT scripture more than any other gospel account. Perhaps Matthew had for a long time struggled with his love for God and money? See, you never know who you're talking to. They may have the heart to turn towards Jesus and become a great follower. Amen to Moore's statement, "*We should learn from Matthew that those on the sidelines who look so antagonistic might just be the greatest converts.*" Yes, Jesus can embrace the leper and the tax collector. Jesus could see in Matthew what others couldn't.
- When Matthew leaves his occupation, he's leaving it for good. He's unlike Andrew and Peter, who could return to the boats! God or money? Levi chose Jesus, and he wouldn't look back. He gave up everything to be with Him.
- Brethren? Who do we associate with? Who are we willing to eat with? Where are we willing to go? Who do you invite to your home? What invitations do you accept? Do you even spend time with others? Things to think about... As Jesus stated in Matthew 9:13, "Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.'" Apparently, that was a statement Rabbi's would use ("Go and learn") when their students didn't do their homework. Jesus is speaking to the leaders like amateurs.

Preferring the Old (33-39)

- Regarding fasting as a side note:
 - The only fast commanded in the OT was on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:29-31; 23:26-32). Also known as Yom Kippur.

- The Jewish practice.—There is an allusion in Ac 27:9 to ‘the Fast,’ which was so par excellence, i.e. the Day of Atonement. But the chief point which we learn from NT is that by this time frequent additional fasts had become customary with those in Judaism who desired to lead a specially religious life, e.g. Anna (Lk 2:37). Again, the Pharisee in the parable says, ‘I fast twice in the week’ (Lk 18:12). The allusion is to the two weekly fast-days, Thursday and Monday, on the former of which days Moses was said to have gone up into the Mount, and on the latter to have come down from it. Mention is made of them frequently in the Talmud. There is also an interesting reference to them in the Didache 8:1, where Christians are bidden not to fast with the hypocrites on the second and fifth days of the week, but on the fourth and on Friday. Further, the question asked of Jesus by the disciples of John and of the Pharisees (Mt 9:14, Mk 2:18, Lk 5:33), reveals the interesting fact that teachers who had gathered about them bands of scholars, used to give to their disciples special rules on the subject.
- The Didache meaning “Teaching” is the short name of a Christian manual compiled before 300AD. The full title is The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles. Some Christians thought Didache was inspired, but the church rejected it when making the final decision which books to include in the New Testament. The Didache contained instructions for Christian groups; and its statement of belief may be the first written catechism. It has four parts: the first is the “Two Ways, the Way of Life and the Way of Death;” the second explains how to perform rituals such as baptism, fasting, and Communion; the third covers ministry and how to deal with traveling teachers; the fourth part is a reminder that Jesus is coming again, with quotations from several New Testament passages which exhort Christians to live godly lives and prepare for “that day.”
 - PRAYER AND FASTING “Your fasting should not be like the hypocrites’. They fast on Monday and the Thursday: you should fast on the Wednesday and Friday. You should not pray like the hypocrites either, but as the Lord commanded in his Gospel:”
- Jesus stated how John came not eating and drinking, but Jesus came eating and drinking. But, they couldn’t do good in the sight of the people (Matthew 11:18-19). John once called Jesus the bridegroom (John 3:29), and as Jesus point out - this isn’t the time to mourn. It’s a wedding, if you will. It’s time to rejoice. There will be a time to mourn when Jesus is gone (His death and ultimate departure).
- Jesus’ point with these parables?
 - What He’s doing and teaching is not meant to mix with the Old. He’s bringing something new. They’re not meant to be one.
 - Some prefer the Old over the New. The Jews would reject His message and hold to the Old Law.
- Application:
 - I think of the leper and how he put his trust in God in a lonely state. We have several single brothers and sisters who may not have the “gift” of Paul, yet they stay faithful and joyful in the Lord. I’m sure this man who thrilled to be around others (understatement), but you hope he never lost his deep trust in God alone. I must be thankful for my wife who is by my side - many don’t have that. Yet, do I have the faith of a leper? It must not be in my wife, but the Lord.

- I think of the friends of the paralytic. Would the Lord see my and my friends the same way? We He think, "a group of believers" or "there's the blind leading the blind." You're typically one-minded with your friends. Is that good or bad?
- I think of Levi's parents. Did they raise him to be materialistic or not? Did they try to lead him away from collecting taxes or not? I've got to do my best to raise my children to seek what is good, not to be a menace to society, and always be willing to repent. Help them, don't hinder them.
- I think the church needs to learn from Jesus. We don't practice the sin with sinners, but we must be around them. That will call for uncomfortable situations. Life is not about our comforts. It's not about making a heaven on earth with the best people life can offer. It's about reaching others with the gospel.
- We've got to prefer a "new way of living." You may prefer how you once lived when Jesus is trying to change you. You may have also turned His law into a black-and-white, legalistic approach. This can make you feel secure, but it will condemn you. Many times, it's not written out the way you want, but that's good because it's making you think, change, and mold. Be careful what you prefer . . .