

MARK

Chapter 2

Jesus Heals a Paralytic

And when he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. 2 And many were gathered together, so that there was no more room, not even at the door. And he was preaching the word to them. 3 And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. 4 And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him, and when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay. 5 And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, **“Son, your sins are forgiven.”** 6 Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, 7 **“Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”** 8 And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, **“Why do you question these things in your hearts? 9 Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk’? 10 But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the paralytic— 11 “I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home.”** 12 And he rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, **“We never saw anything like this!”**

2:1-12 Mark’s Gospel exhibits, by means of Jesus’ mighty words and works, that Jesus is the Son of God. The first chapter can be called the chapter of glory. As our text begins, Jesus has completed his first circuit of Galilee and already, early in his ministry, his opponents organize resistance. Jesus returns to his adopted hometown because the people of Nazareth had attempted to kill him (Lk 4:29). After the text, Jesus continues his ministry and meets resistance that dogs him to the cross and harasses his church even now. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 1)

In this story, the whirlwind of activity of the first part of Mark reaches its climax. After his Baptism, there has been nonstop action. Facing and overcoming the temptation of the devil (in two verses), Jesus calls for repentance and announces the kingdom (picking up where John left off). He then calls disciples and goes into battle with the forces of evil by preaching, healing, and casting out demons. It would be a mistake to see Jesus travel to, away from, and back to Capernaum as if he were “on the run” from the crowds. Rather, Mark intends for us to see a Jesus who takes the battle to the enemy without letup. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 1)

2:1 *when he had returned - palin* signals the completion of the circuit begun in Capernaum (1:21, 39). *Di hēmerōn* is an indeterminate time. Compare translations of the last five words of this verse. Both whose house is meant and the means through which Jesus’ presence became known are indefinite. The setting never mattered; Jesus never missed a chance to give them the Word. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 1)

home. When in Capernaum, Jesus probably made his home at Peter’s house (see 1:21, 29). (CSB)

The setting never really mattered; Jesus never missed a chance to give them the Word.
(Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 1)

After concluding his first preaching tour of Galilee, the Lord returned to his home in Capernaum.
(PBC)

The movement of Jesus in the early phase of the Galilean ministry seems to alternate between “the wilderness” and the city. From Capernaum (1:21-34) he had departed to a “wilderness place” (1:35) before going to other towns and villages proclaiming the Kingdom of God. When his preaching tour was disrupted by the presence of crowds at the city gates clamoring for some benefaction he again returned to the “wilderness places” (1:45). His entrance into Capernaum marks a return to the city. (Lane)

2:1–2 *at home ... preaching the word.* Jesus’ practice of preaching within a domestic setting, as described here, set a precedent for His followers. For the next 300 years, Christian worship services usually took place in house churches. (TLSB)

2:2 *So many gathered.* The same enthusiasm that greeted Jesus earlier (1:32–33, 37) was evident at his return. (CSB)

and – Here means “as a result.” The crowd includes sympathetic, curious and hostile people.
(Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 1)

Here *kai* means “as a result.” Compare several translations. The point is why the men bearing the paralytic took an extraordinary route to Jesus. The crowd includes sympathetic, curious, and hostile people. *Elalei* means informal speech, and here *ton logon* is Gospel in the narrow sense.
(Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 1)

preaching – *laleo* - prolonged form of an otherwise obsolete verb; to *talk*, that is, *utter* words:—preach, say, speak (after), talk, tell, utter.(B)

“he was preaching the word to them.” “The word” here apparently means a development, in some fashion, of “the time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news.” It also apparently had not yet included the direct pronouncement of forgiveness of sins.
(Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 1)

Jesus met their need by preaching the Word, just as he had done throughout his tour of Galilee.
(PBC)

word – The Gospel in the narrow sense. (B)

2:3 *bringing to him* - The subject of the sentence is implied in *tessarōn*. *Erchontai* is historic present. The four bearers came specifically to Jesus—*pros auton*. Only the Authorized Version (“palsy”) does not translate with either “paralytic” or “a paralyzed man.” The lack of words from his mouth in this text and its parallels may or may not indicate he could speak only with difficulty or not at all. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 1)

a paralytic. Nothing definite can be said about the nature of the man's affliction beyond the fact that he could not walk. The determination of the four men to reach Jesus suggests that his condition was desperate. (CSB)

Cause of this man's paralysis is not stated. Plainly, he was unable to move without the help of his friends. (TLSB)

2:4 *they removed the roof.* A typical Palestinian house had a flat roof accessible by means of an outside staircase. The roof was often made of a thick layer of clay (packed with a stone roller), supported by mats of branches across wood beams. (CSB)

This would have resulted in debris and dust flying everywhere. Between the press of the crowd and the damage being done to the roof, the scene takes on elements of chaos and even danger. (TLSB)

Entrance was not gained through a trapdoor nor by removing the cover from an existing hole. They literally dug through the tiles (Lk 5:19). They may have used a ladder but probably found a staircase outside the house or one adjacent. The whole process involved planning and work, especially since they lowered the mat directly in front of Jesus (Lk 5:19) without going inside to take measurements. A hole in the ceiling and a pallet coming down must have startled and frightened people inside. The action impressed Jesus as a demonstration of faith. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 1)

A hole in the ceiling and a pallet coming down must have startled and frightened people inside. In Palestine at that time, roofs were often made of branches laid over beams. These were covered with a layer of beaten dirt, another layer of branches followed by more dirt. Sometimes additional layers were used. (B)

bed. Stretcherlike mat. (TLSB)

2:5 *When Jesus saw their faith.* Jesus recognized that the bold action of the paralyzed man and his friends gave evidence of faith. (CSB)

Though Christian teaching often emphasizes—and rightly so—that people need to have personal faith, this story illustrates how one person acting in faith can benefit another. Thus, the four friends seek blessings for the paralytic because they believed Jesus could heal him. (TLSB)

The antecedent of *autōn* includes all five men, even though the four bearers did the work. We know that the man on the mat shared their faith because of Jesus' first words to him. *Idōn* must mean that Jesus saw not only the deed but also the faith in their hearts. Since no spoken word is recorded from any of them, they probably did not say anything. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 1)

“saw their faith.” While later Jesus will “perceive” the thoughts of the “hearts” of the scribes, here he “sees” the faith of the paralytic and his friends as he sees their actions that put the paralytic in front of him for healing. Their faith has actions. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 1)

“Their faith.” Much mischief and misunderstanding can be avoided by understanding that “their” might include the paralytic as well as his friends. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 1)

son – Teknon is a term of endearment that does not necessarily imply age. Luke has *anthrōpe* or “friend.” Matthew adds “Take heart,” As always, when God says, “Fear not,” a reason to take heart immediately follows. In human terms, the paralytic had reason to be sad. He had lain on a mat in near total immobility for weeks if not years. He had plenty of time to grieve over his sinful state. Jesus’ words deal first with the paralytic’s greatest concern. *Aphientai* is aoristic present and signifies that his sins were forgiven *right now*. The man was standing upright before God even while he was still lying flat on his back. We cannot assume that his condition was the result of any particular sin (see Lenski). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 1)

Implies affection and familial concern. (TLSB)

your sins are forgiven. Jesus first met the man’s deepest need: forgiveness. (CSB)

Given the widespread belief in Jesus’ day that people became ill as the result of some personal sin, this word of grace is noteworthy. Cf Jn 9:1–5. (TLSB)

apaie forgive, forsake, lay aside, leave, let (alone, be, go, have), omit, put (send) away, remit, suffer, yield up. – In human terms, the paralytic had reason to be sad. He had lain on a mat in near total immobility for weeks if not years. He had had plenty of time to grieve over his sinful state. Jesus’ words deal first with the paralytic’s greatest concern. By being forgiven, the man was standing upright before God even while he was still laying flat on his back. We can not assume that his condition was the result of any particular sin. As if to underscore that the Gospel is for others too, our Lord turned immediately to the paralytic. His preaching interrupted, an awkward moment, He said “Son your sins are forgiven!” Spontaneous compassion is the only true compassion. God’s forgiveness of sins, unconditional and free, is emphasized by the pretoric aorist, “Your sins are forgiven at this very moment!” There is the closest link between spiritual healing and making the body whole, both miracles of Jesus. The forgiveness of sins, removing all guilt and fear and doubt regarding our relationship with God, is a one gift. The other is wellness in the body. Together they comprise that wholeness of life which Jesus came to give freely during his earthly ministry. Jesus’ words of forgiveness recognize that man can be genuinely well only when his sins have been forgiven. – This is intelligible against the background provided by the OT where sin and disease, forgiveness and healing are frequently interrelated concepts. Healing is conditioned by the forgiveness of God and is often the demonstration of that forgiveness. It is unnecessary to think of a corresponding sin for each instance of sickness; there is no suggestion in the narrative that the paralytic’s physical suffering was related to a specific sin or was due to hysteria induced guilt. (Lane)

2:6-7 “Who can forgive sins but God alone?” There was simply no precedent for what Jesus had just done. No one but God alone had ever granted forgiveness, and, according to Scripture, God seems to have held that prerogative for himself. Not one of the prophets, not even Moses, had bestowed forgiveness. Were Jesus not God in the flesh, the teachers of the law would have been correct and, according to the Law, Jesus would have been guilty of blasphemy (the punishment for which was death by stoning). Note that the scribes also did not take Jesus’ words to be a mere statement of fact or a deduction based on words of Scripture, but understood that Jesus was authoritatively and directly extending forgiveness to the paralytic. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 1)

2:6 sitting – Note that the teachers of the Law were *sitting*. They were full of themselves, and the people held them in high regard. Already near the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, his opponents came from Jerusalem to sit in judgment. John expands on the early rejection of Jesus. We have no indication that they consulted with one another, yet Jesus reads the common thoughts of their hearts. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 1)

Some of these may be described as “canon lawyers.” They, together with the Pharisees, considered themselves to be the authoritative teachers and inspired interpreters of Scripture (341 Oral Laws which in the pre-A.D. 70 period had been added by them as binding rules for daily living. – That they were in a crowded room indicates that they considered themselves important that the people showed them respect. (B)

They saw in Jesus not God’s Son come to redeem them and all men, but a rival who would rob them of the esteem and honor they were accustomed to receive because they were teachers of God’s law. Their attitude was inexcusable. They had heard his message and witnessed his miracles, and knowing the Scriptures they had no reason to reject him. But they hardened their hearts. They were present for one purpose alone – to find fault with Jesus. (PBC)

2:7 He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone? In Jewish theology even the Messiah could not forgive sins, and Jesus’ forgiveness of sin was a claim to deity—which they considered to be blasphemous. (CSB)

Unbelieving hearts rationalize from human reason. The structure of their syllogism is correct, but the minor premise and conclusion are wrong: only God can forgive sins. This man is not God. Therefore this man cannot forgive sins. Their hardened hearts are spiritually blind. By judging Jesus to be sinful, they are elevating their opinions of themselves. The contrast with the faith of the five is stark. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 1)

Their hardened hearts are spiritually blind. By judging Jesus to be sinful, they are elevating their opinions of themselves. – In the OT God alone can forgive sins, and later Judaism adhered scrupulously to this understanding. The Messiah would exterminate the godless in Israel, crush demonic power and protect his people from the reign of sin, but the forgiveness of sins was never attributed to him. (Lane)

They had their own predetermined view of what the Savior was to be and therefore missed him completely. They still haven’t found him.

2:8-11 Jesus seems to take their objection to what he has just stated as illogical because he has been teaching with authority (1:22) and doing the works of God (healing and exorcism). He then uses a variation of arguing from the lesser to the greater to demonstrate his authority (granting physical healing to demonstrate his authority to grant forgiveness). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 1)

2:8 in his Spirit – *tō pneumati autou* points to Jesus’ divine nature. Even while he reads the evil emanating from their hearts (see Mt 12:35), he reaches out to them. He does not say directly, “You are wrong.” He does present opportunity to revise logic. When Jesus told them what they were thinking, that by itself demonstrated his divine power. Since he read minds, it follows that he could forgive sins. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 1)

Jesus' knowledge of his opponents' inner thoughts reveals His supernatural perception and shows His divinity. Ironically, that is the very thing being called into question (v 7). (TLSB)

2:9 *Which is easier ... ?* Jesus' point probably was that neither forgiving sins nor healing was easier. Both are equally impossible to men and equally easy to God. (CSB)

Ambrose: "With His blood, then, as man, the Lord redeemed us, who also, as God, has forgiven sins" (NPNF 2 10:247). (TLSB)

The infinitives have no subject. Jesus does not yet involve himself. He asks the teachers to compare the two acts, no matter who is the agent. *Eipein* here means "to say *with results*." They were thinking, Words are cheap. He is about to demonstrate that his words are powerful and effective to forgive sins. Where they use logic to condemn, Jesus is gentle in his appeal to corrected logic. The time has not yet come to condemn. Jesus is loving even in confronting illogical thinking. Jesus' question does not ask them to make a choice. He wants them to conclude that both acts are equally difficult and that only someone with God's authority can do either. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 1)

2:10 *But that you may know.* Probably spoken to the teachers of the law. The words "He said to the paralytic" are parenthetical to explain a change in the persons addressed. For a discussion of the title "Son of Man" see note on 8:31. It is clear that one purpose of miracles was to give evidence of Jesus' deity. See the use of miraculous signs in John's Gospel (2:11; 20:30-31). (CSB)

This deliberately anacoluthic verse permits Jesus' audience to fill in the blank with something like, "I shall now act." (However, note that *NICNT* suggests that v 10a is a parenthetical comment addressed by Mark to his audience rather than spoken by Jesus to his.) (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 1)

The Jews, especially the scribes, expected many things of the Messiah, but to forgive sins was *not* one of them. See *NICNT*. Even if they had conceded that Jesus was the Messiah, he would still, in their opinion, be blaspheming by announcing forgiveness of sins because, they believed, forgiveness was reserved for God in heaven. This is the specific point that drove Jesus' opponents to consider capital punishment already at the beginning of his public ministry (Jn 5:18). Jesus brings forgiveness *on earth*. The Word has become flesh. Christmas peace is *on earth*. The three parallel accounts all include the phrase. See Lenski for a discussion of the term "Son of Man," which Mark uses here for the first time. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 1)

By using this title our Savior also demonstrated that as the Messiah he was more than just Israel's Savior; he was the Savior of all. The words of Daniel 7:13,14 clearly indicated so: "In my vision at night I looked and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all people, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed." (PBC)

on earth to forgive sins – Evidently Jesus' enemies were thinking that sins can be forgiven only far away in heaven. No, says Jesus, but right here on earth. Note that Jesus does not limit this to the paralyzed man. He is speaking of a principle, not just an individual case. Jesus forgave sins on earth and he has given the Office of the Keys to the Church to forgive sin on earth. (B)

2:11–12 Ambrose: “He charged the man to perform an action of which health was the necessary condition, even while the patient was yet praying a remedy for his disease” (*NPNF* 2 10:269). This man would have had to pass through many people in this crowded house. His action provided incontrovertible confirmation that Jesus fully healed him. Jesus’ miracles were live illustrations that He was the Messiah. (TLSB)

2:11 *you – soi* is very personal. The first two of the three imperatives are effective aorists while the third is continued action. Jesus’ word causes results in empowering the man to walk and in forgiving his sins. Jesus’ word is enough. He specifically gave us his word to forgive sins. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 1)

2:12 *he rose* – The verbs in this verse are exactly parallel to those in the previous verse. The man carries the bed that had carried him. The men on the roof, the teachers of the Law, and the crowd saw the results. How did the man get through the crowd? The Living Bible translates: “The man jumped up, took the stretcher, and pushed his way through the stunned onlookers!” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 1)

This amazed everyone – The reaction of the crowd is unanimous except for the unbelievers (see Mt 9:8). Mark says those in the crowd praised God because they had seen the man walk. He does *not* say that they read the sign as pointing to Jesus as the Son of Man and promised Messiah. This is in marked contrast to the faith of the disciples John tells us about in Jn 2:11. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 1)

Existasthai and *doxazein* are very strong verbs. Most of the people did not yet acknowledge Jesus as the Son of Man, but they made progress in that they did glorify God. We should not be surprised that Mark does not record any reaction from the healed man nor his friends; they came to Jesus already believing. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 1)

edziste to *put (stand) out of wits*, that is, *astound*, or (reflexively) *become astounded, insane*:—amaze, be (make) astonished, be beside self (selves), bewitch, wonder. – The healing of the paralytic was more than a display of mercy to a wretched man. The announcement and presentation of radical healing to a man in his entire person was a sign of the Kingdom of God drawn near. All present glorified God because he redeemed men from every distress. (Lane)

Through Mark’s account we too are strengthened in our faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of Man, our Savior. (PBC)

glorified – *doxaso* to *render (or esteem) glorious* (in a wide application):—(make) glorify (-ious), full of (have) glory, honor, magnify. Both verbs are very strong. Most people did not yet acknowledge Jesus as the Son of Man, but they made progress in that they did glorify God. We should be surprised that Mark does not record any reaction from the healed man nor his friends; they came to Jesus already believing. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 1)

2:1–12 In the presence of many who doubt Jesus’ ability, He forgives and heals a paralyzed man simply by speaking the word. Today, there are still some who doubt the power of Jesus’ Word—there will always be such naysayers. But, as Peter reminds us, though our flesh will perish, the Word of the Lord stands forever (1Pt 1:24–25). Through faith in the Gospel, we receive the promise of life everlasting. • Lord, You can do all things. Give us such a bold confidence in You

that even those around us, many of whom are paralyzed by sin and doubt, may be blessed through our steadfastness. Amen. (TLSB)

The Calling of Levi

13 He went out again beside the sea, and all the crowd was coming to him, and he was teaching them. 14 And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he rose and followed him. 15 And as he reclined at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. 16 And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?” 17 And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”

2:14 *Levi son of Alphaeus.* Matthew (see Mt 9:9; 10:3). His given name was probably Levi, and Matthew (“gift of the LORD”) his apostolic name. (CSB)

tax collector’s booth. Levi was a tax collector (see note on Lk 3:12) under Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee. The tax collector’s booth where Jesus found Levi was probably a toll booth on the major international road that went from Damascus through Capernaum to the Mediterranean coast and to Egypt (see the “way of the sea,” Isa 9:1). (CSB)

Levi had long collected taxes in Capernaum. Such collaboration with the occupying Romans was considered traitorous by most Jews. (TLSB)

2:15 *sinners.* † Notoriously evil people as well as those who either refused or lacked the time to follow the Mosaic law as interpreted by the teachers of the law. The term was commonly used of tax collectors, adulterers, robbers and the like. (CSB)

were eating. To eat with a person was a sign of friendship. (CSB)

disciples. μαθηταῖς—The noun μαθητής, “disciple,” appears here for the first time in Mark’s Gospel. It denotes the pupils of a rabbi or master. In this Gospel, it seems that it can denote the Twelve (e.g., 9:14, 28; 10:23, 24 [cf. 10:28]; 14:32 [cf. 14:33]), but it can also denote a larger group (e.g., 14:13, 16 [cf. 14:17 and especially 14:20]). Perhaps 2:15 belongs to the latter usage. (CC)

2:16 *teachers of the law who were Pharisees.* † Not all teachers of the law were Pharisees—successors of the Hasidim, pious Jews who joined forces with the Maccabees during the struggle for freedom from Syrian oppression (166–142 B.C.). They first appear under the name Pharisees during the reign of John Hyrcanus (135–105). Although some, no doubt, were godly, most of those who came into conflict with Jesus were rigid and formalistic. According to Pharisaism, God’s grace extended only to those who kept his law. See notes on Mt 3:7; Lk 5:17. (CSB)

Jesus’ opponents become more numerous. In v 6, only the scribes opposed Him. (TLSB)

eating. Pious Jews, esp Pharisees, would not associate with Gentiles, tax collectors, or openly wicked Jews, let alone eat with them. Sharing a table with sinners was regarded as a defiling act (Lk 15:1–2; Ac 11:3). (TLSB)

tax collectors. Jewish tax collectors were regarded as outcasts. They could not serve as witnesses or as judges and were expelled from the synagogue. In the eyes of the Jewish community their disgrace extended to their families. (CSB)

2:17 *I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.* A self-righteous man does not realize his need for salvation, but an admitted sinner does. (CSB)

Christ came to heal sinners (cf vv 1–12). Just as physicians must have contact with the diseased, so also Jesus' ministry obliged Him to associate with sinners and social outcasts. (TLSB)

2:13–17 Jesus outrages His critics by calling Levi the tax collector to follow Him, then eats with a houseful of equally “defiled” people. This story invites the modern hearer to reflect: am I more like the manifest sinners of this story or like those who criticize Jesus' openness to be with the unworthy? Either way, you stand in need of forgiveness. Thankfully, Jesus brings healing and forgiveness to all, even manifest sinners and smug hypocrites. • Lord, preserve us from both our crass and hidden sins. Grant us a rich measure of Your grace, that others may see Your mercy and be drawn to the healing and fellowship that only You can provide. Amen. (TLSB)

Jesus Questioned About Fasting

18 Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. And people came and said to him, “Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?” **19** And Jesus said to them, “Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. **20** The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day. **21** No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the patch tears away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. **22** And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins—and the wine is destroyed, and so are the skins. But new wine is for fresh wineskins.”

2:18 *John's disciples.* † John the Baptist's disciples may have been fasting because he was in prison (see 1:14), or it probably was a practice among them as an expression of repentance, intended to hasten the coming of redemption announced by John. (CSB)

disciples of the Pharisees. Pharisees as such were not teachers, but some were also “scribes” (teachers of the law), who often had disciples. Or perhaps the phrase is used in a nontechnical way to refer to people influenced by the Pharisees. (CSB)

Originally, the name of this party meant “the separate ones.” What separated the Pharisees from other Jews was their rigorous interpretations and strict observance of the Jewish Law. (TLSB)

fasting. In the Mosaic law only the fast of the Day of Atonement was required (Lev 16:29, 31; 23:27–32; Nu 29:7). After the Babylonian exile four other yearly fasts were observed by the Jews (Zec 7:5; 8:19). In Jesus' time the Pharisees fasted twice a week (see Lk 18:12). (CSB)

Pharisees fasted twice weekly (on the second and fifth days of the week, according to the *Didache*; ANF 1:174). This went far beyond the required annual fast (affliction) on the Day of Atonement (Lv 23:26–32; Ac 27:9) and the few mentioned in Zec 8:19. Fasting, therefore, was an important aspect of the Pharisees' ritual observance. (TLSB)

At this time it was customary for the Pharisees to fast on Monday and Thursday of each week. It appears to have been an expression of piety and self-consecration. (Lane)

That Jesus did not forbid condemn fasting is clear from Mt 6:17-18. He did condemn the fasting by the Pharisees as rankest work-righteousness, Lk. 18:12. That God condemned mere formal fasting, not connected with contrition and faith, is apparent already in the OT. See Is 58:6,7 and Zech 7:1-10. (B)

2:19–20 Fasting is a time for sorrow or penitence, whereas feasting is associated with joy. Jesus emphasizes that feasting is proper because the Messiah (the Bridegroom) is now present among God's people. Jesus hastens to add that He will someday be taken away from them (after His death, resurrection, and ascension), and then God's people will have occasions to fast. (TLSB)

2:19 *can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom fast is with them?* Jesus compared his disciples with the guests of a bridegroom. A Jewish wedding was a particularly joyous occasion, and the celebration associated with it often lasted a week. It was unthinkable to fast during such festivities, because fasting was associated with sorrow. (CSB)

2:20 *when the bridegroom will be taken from them.* Jesus is the bridegroom, who would be taken from them by death, and then fasting would be in order. (CSB)

The word for taken away is *aparche* and is a violent one. It predicts Jesus' violent death. The disciples of Jesus will suffer much tribulation and persecution for the sake of their Master, enduring patiently the cross and shame of Christ. This is the kind of fasting that is pleasing to God. (B)

2:21 *piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment* – The piety of the Pharisees and their work-righteousness does not harmonize with the doctrine of Jesus and his teaching of the free grace of God, being unable to tolerate each other. He who trusts in his own works and wants to sew something of the Gospel on his own garment of righteousness, to cover an occasional mistake with the works and merits of Christ, will soon experience that there is no comfort in this, he still clings to his own works and merits, and will be lost with the comfort of his works.

2:22 *new wineskins* – Nobody puts new (unfermented) wine into old (stiff) wineskins. The old cannot be kept by adding a little of the new; still less by combining with it all of a new. The new wine is the sweet Gospel of the forgiveness of sins and of the grace of God, which cannot be placed into carnal, pharisaic hearts. If the Gospel is preached to the work-righteous people, it only will be split. They cannot understand the Gospel, nor will they be improved by it, but rather grow worse and in their defiance will be lost in spite of the Gospel. The Gospel requires new believing hearts, which accept it and preserve it, and with it they themselves are preserved to eternal life.

2:18–22 Jesus stresses that the time of fulfillment has arrived, and thus totally new ways of thinking and acting are in order. In our own lives, the same dynamic is at work. It will not do simply to patch some little bit of the Gospel onto our existing lifestyle and expect it all to hold together. Thankfully, the Lord offers such surpassingly great promises that the old is made obsolete. That is what Paul meant when he said, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation" (2Co 5:17). • Lord, so fill us with the surpassingly great promises of Your Gospel that we count all else as loss for the greater hope of attaining eternity with You. Amen. (TLSB)

Lord of the Sabbath

23 One Sabbath he was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. 24 And the Pharisees were saying to him, “Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?” 25 And he said to them, “Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: 26 how he entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?” 27 And he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. 28 So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.”

2:23-28 Mark reports that Jesus was often followed by the Pharisees as he traveled throughout Galilee (Mark 2:1–3:30). Unfortunately, their purpose was not to join Jesus’ “followers,” but to trap him with questions or catch him violating the Torah. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 7, Part 3)

The other gospel accounts add details to the specific incident recorded in our text. Matthew (12:1–8) notes that the disciples were hungry and that they ate some of the heads of grain. Matthew notes additional words from the Lord of the Sabbath that point to him as the new temple (cf. Jn 2:19–22) and the one who brings mercy: “Or haven’t you read in the Law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple desecrate the day and yet are innocent? I tell you that one greater than the temple is here. If you had known what these words mean, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the innocent” (vv 5–7). Thus Jesus is not violating the OT, but fulfilling it in accord with the prophets (the quote is from Hos 6:6). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 7, Part 3)

Luke 6:1–5 gives greater detail regarding the actions of the disciples: “his disciples began to pick some heads of grain, rub them in their hands and eat the kernels.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 7, Part 3)

2:23-24 Walking through a grain field on the Sabbath, the hungry disciples (Mt 12:1) picked the ripened grain, shucked the skins, blew them to the wind, and ate the kernels. The Mosaic law recorded in Deut 23:25 permits the disciples’ actions: “If you enter your neighbor’s grain field, you may pick kernels with your hands, but you must not put a sickle to his standing grain.” In this way God provided food for the hungry traveler while also protecting the farmer from a thief who might try to harvest a significant part of his crop. Surely the Pharisees would have known of the Torah’s approval, but they object to these actions *on the Sabbath*. The Torah prohibited labor on the Sabbath (Ex 34:21). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 7, Part 3)

The issue is whether the disciples are merely grabbing a bite to eat while on the run (permitted by the Torah), or engaging in the work of the harvest (prohibited on the Sabbath). Obviously, the disciples are taking only what they will eat right away. They are not doing the work of selling, transporting, or storing grain as was done in harvesting, so their actions are lawful according to the Torah. God permits his people to eat on the Sabbath too! (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 7, Part 3)

The oral law of the Pharisees was more detailed and often stricter than God’s Torah, but even so, it is not clear that the disciples’ behavior would have violated it. Of the 39 main categories of work forbidden on the Sabbath in the Mishnah (the later Jewish codification of the oral law, largely reflecting the theology of the Pharisaic branch of Judaism), the third is reaping. Four of

the Pharisees' rules dictate against reaping, threshing, winnowing, and preparing a meal on the Sabbath day. But the disciples' actions hardly constitute reaping the harvest or preparing a meal (which usually involved butchering an animal, cooking, etc.). Nevertheless, the Pharisees accuse the disciples of being lawbreakers. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 7, Part 3)

Jesus assumes responsibility for what his disciples were doing, even though the text does not say Jesus picked any grain. Among the scribes it was assumed that a teacher was responsible for the behavior of his disciples. But Jesus doesn't descend to their level of legalism. He does not argue the point, either on the basis of Torah or the Pharisees' oral additions. He has a greater purpose: to proclaim the Gospel of the Son of Man, who is Lord of the Sabbath. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 7, Part 3)

2:23 ONE SABBATH - *en tois sabbasin paraporeuesthai dia tōn sporimōn*, “on the Sabbath he went through the grain fields” (author's translation). The placement of the phrase *en tois sabbasin* near the beginning of the sentence emphasizes that this was the unique aspect of the occasion, and thereby the source of the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisee party. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 3)

pick some heads of grain. There was nothing wrong in the action itself, which comes under the provision of Dt 23:25. (CSB)

The action of the disciples—picking grain by hand in a neighbor's field—was allowed by the Mosaic law (Dent 23:25). However, the Pharisees interpreted the act as reaping, which was prohibited on the Sabbath (Ex 34:21). While Scripture did not explicitly prohibit plucking by hand on the Sabbath as reaping, Jewish law did (Jerusalem Talmud, *Shabbath* VII. 2, 9c), and the third of the 39 categories of work prohibited on the Sabbath by Jewish law was reaping (Mishnah, *Shabbath* VII. 2). Jewish law typically extended and added to the Biblical commandments for the purpose of preventing people from doing anything that might in some way violate a Biblical command. In this way they “built a fence around the Torah.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 3)

hoi mathētai autou ērksanto hodon poiein tillontes tous stachuas, “on the way his disciples were plucking for themselves the ears of grain” (author's translation). The middle voice expressed with the verb *ērksantō* is significant, because it emphasizes that the disciples were taking this food for themselves, not for others. This action, which might seem to us to be a form of stealing, was expressly allowed by the Law of Moses (Deut 23:25). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 3)

2:24 what is unlawful on the Sabbath. According to Jewish tradition (in the Mishnah), harvesting (which is what Jesus' disciples technically were doing) was forbidden on the Sabbath. See Ex 34:21. (CSB)

Since a teacher was considered responsible for the conduct of his disciples, the Pharisees registered their complaint with Jesus. In the Third Commandment (Dent 5:12–15, the Old Testament Lesson) God instructed his people to keep the Sabbath by resting on it, remembering the rest he had given them by delivering them from slavery. It was a holy day commemorating God's salvation, a day set aside for them and their spiritual needs. The Jews had inverted this, making it a day of Law instead of Gospel. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 3)

ide ti poiou sin tois sabbasin ho ouk exestin, “Look, why do they do what it is not permitted to do on the Sabbath?” (author’s translation). This was the point of controversy, based on the interpretation of Ex 34:21: “Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall rest. In plowing time and in harvest you shall rest” (ESV; see also Ex 20:9–10; 23:12; 31:15; 35:2). The rabbis interpreted the plucking of grain by the disciples as the sort of harvesting prohibited by this verse. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 3)

A literal interpretation of Ex 34:21 sees that its intent was to preserve the Sabbath time of rest through the days of harvest and plowing, when the farmers would be tempted to push their animals and servants to the limit in order to maximize their profit. However, even the rabbis acknowledged that a higher purpose, such as to preserve life or to serve the Lord (as done by the priests on the Sabbath, Mt 12:5), superseded the ceremonial law. Thus the disciples had committed no sin at all, even by standards of Jewish law, since they were in fact following in the Lord’s service. The misunderstanding, obviously, was the Pharisees’ failure to recognize Jesus as the Lord. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 3)

2:25-26 Jesus calls attention to an incident recorded in 1 Sam 21:1–6, which involved David, whom the Pharisees held in high regard. David broke a divine ceremonial stipulation of the Torah, not just a human interpretation. Fleeing from Saul, he asked the priest for food, but the only food available was the holy bread (showbread) in the tabernacle. Twelve loaves were made each week and placed on the golden table in front of the Holy of Holies. Each week these were replaced, and the old ones were to be eaten by the priests. But the priest allowed David and his men to eat the showbread. (Mark is the only gospel writer who mentions that the high priest was Abiathar, which raises some textual questions.) Jesus assumes that the Pharisees, familiar with this story, will agree with him that David did right by eating the showbread even though the Torah set apart this sacred bread for priests alone. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 7, Part 3)

Jesus’ point in citing 1 Sam 21:1–6 (and Hos 6:6 in Mt 12:7) is that the OT Scriptures themselves testify to a higher divine purpose than rote obedience to the letter of the law. The Torah was given by God, to be sure; but its goal is the inculcation of *mercy based on God’s grace*. The prophets reinforce that message in their commentary on the Torah (the book of Samuel is one of the “former *prophets*” in the Hebrew canon). The Pharisees have missed the true intent of OT Scripture, and that is why they fail to recognize its fulfillment in Jesus. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 7, Part 3)

2:25 *have you never read - oudepote anegnōte*, “have you never read?” Here Jesus catches the scholars at their game. They should know the biblical precedent he cites. This is, of course, highly embarrassing to the scholars and Pharisees, and it makes them hate him all the more, although his purpose is to teach his disciples. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 3)

what David did. See 1Sa 21:1–6. The relationship between the OT incident and the apparent infringement of the Sabbath by the disciples lies in the fact that on both occasions godly men did something forbidden. Since, however, it is always “lawful” to do good and to save life (even on the Sabbath), both David and the disciples were within the spirit of the law (see Isa 58:6–7; Lk 6:6–11; 13:10–17; 14:1–6). (CSB)

Jesus pointed out their error, citing Scripture (1 Sam 21:1–6). The same David these Pharisees revered (Matt 22:42) had set aside a divine law because he and his companions were hungry.

Jesus, much greater than David, did the same for his companions. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 3)

epoiēsen David hote chreian eschen kai epeinasen, “what David did when he was in need and hungry” (NKJV). This is a reference to 1 Sam 21:1–6. David’s encroachment on the Law in this story was due to vital physical necessity, not due to desires, pleasure, rebellion, or convenience. David, like the disciples, was on the Lord’s errand as he, the Lord’s anointed, fled from Saul. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 3)

2:26 *In the days of Abiathar the high priest.* According to 1Sa 21:1, Ahimelech, Abiathar’s father, was then high priest (see note on 2Sa 8:17). (CSB)

Who was high priest when David came to the temple? 1 Sam 21:1 says it was Ahimelech, but the usual translation of Mark 2:26 says it was Abiathar. In 2 Sam 8:17; 1 Chron 18:16; 24:3, 6, 31, Ahimelech is called the son of Abiathar. In 1 Sam 21–22, Abiathar is called the son of Ahimelech. Both father and son may have had the same names, as is occasionally the custom yet today, or perhaps both were present in the temple. Ahimelech soon died, and his son Abiathar succeeded him as high priest, so Mark 2:26 is correct if it says that the event took place in Abiathar’s day. But the genitive construction in Mark 2:26 may instead mean that the event is recorded in the section of the book of Samuel that *concerns* Abiathar, as does *epi tou batou*, “the section *concerning* the thorn-bush,” in Mark 12:26. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 3)

pōs eisēlthen eis ton oikon tou theou epi Abiathar archiereōs kai tous artous tēs protheseōs ephagen, hous ouk exestin phagein ei mē tous hierēis, kai edōken kai tois sun autōi ousin, “how David went into the house of God at [the time of] Abiathar the high priest and ate the holy bread, which is not lawful to eat except for the priests, and also gave some to those who were with him” (author’s translation). David asked the high priest for food for his men. All that was available was the consecrated bread of the tabernacle, which was reserved for use by the priests (see Lev 24:5–9). David argued that since this bread was no longer on the table in the tabernacle, it was really no longer holy bread, but simply common bread belonging to the priest (1 Sam 21:5–6). The high priest accepted this explanation and gave his bread to David and his men. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 3)

David’s argument that holy bread is simply common bread once it has completed its ceremonial purpose has New Testament application. By the same reasoning, the water, bread, and wine that remain after the Christian sacraments are again “common,” and may be reserved, or used for other purposes as needed, but they should not be prohibited from being used simply because they are thought to be holy. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 3)

2:27-28 Jesus drives home his point by saying that even the Sabbath is subservient to the greater divine purpose of grace. fact, today’s OT Lesson affirms that the purpose of the Sabbath is to remind God’s people of his grace in delivering them. Now Jesus has come to accomplish the final deliverance of God’s people, so “the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.” Jesus brings in full the blessings of grace, peace, and rest which Israel received only in part through the institution of the Sabbath and the deliverance from Egypt. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 7, Part 3)

While Jesus is not legalistic, neither is he antinomian. In asserting his Lordship, he is not giving himself or his disciples license to spurn the Torah. Jesus placed himself “under law” (Gal 4:4),

faithfully observing it for us and in our place. But even while submitting to the law in order to fulfill it, Jesus demonstrates his own authority over it, and at the same time he debunks the claims of those who thought their authority should not be challenged. The mercy of God brought by Christ is the heart of the Torah. As described in last week's sermon study on Deut 6:6–9, through faith in Christ the Spirit of the Torah is written on the hearts of God's people. Our hearts are changed by the One who bestows grace and mercy without measure. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 7, Part 3)

2:27 *The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.* Jewish tradition had so multiplied the requirements and restrictions for keeping the Sabbath that the burden had become intolerable. Jesus cut across these traditions and emphasized the God-given purpose of the Sabbath—a day intended for man (for spiritual, mental and physical restoration; see Ex 20:8–11). (CSB)

Jesus clarifies God's purpose in establishing the Sabbath: this day of rest was primarily intended to restore people, not make them slaves of arbitrary rules and regulations. Luther: "Man was especially created for the knowledge and worship of God; for the Sabbath was not ordained for sheep and cows but for men, that in them the knowledge of God might be developed and might increase" (AE 1:80). (TLSB)

Of the three Gospel accounts, (Matt 12:1–8; Luke 6:1–5), only Mark records this statement by Jesus which is very important in interpreting the Third Commandment. God created the Sabbath to be a blessing for his people, not as a burdensome law to which they must conform legalistically. Modern church leaders must be careful not to turn Sunday worship into a law. Today many businesses are open on Sunday, and many churches hold worship services on days other than Sunday. We have an innate need for a Sabbath rest and worship. There may be great value in observing the traditional Sabbath day, but the essential point is not the day of the week. God would have us provide an opportunity for his people to find rest in the arms, of Jesus' blood-bought forgiveness. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 3)

to sabbaton dia ton anthrōpon egeneto kai ouch ho anthrōpos dia to sabbaton, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath" (NKJV). Jesus derives this principle from a reading of Ex 23:12, which says that one of the primary purposes of the Sabbath was to give rest to the animals and people who had to engage in physical labor. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 3)

The "making holy" aspect of the Sabbath is also made for people. "The Sabbath was made for man," so that people have time to receive God's gifts of Word and Sacraments. The Sabbath, with both its worship and rest aspects, is a gift from God to men. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 3)

2:28 Jesus' reason for referring to the story of David eating the holy bread (vv 25–26) comes clear: the Lord of the Sabbath—Jesus—is greater than King David. This bold claim to divinity is not lost on Jesus' critics, as 3:2, 6 show. (TLSB)

Jesus uses his favorite apocalyptic designation for himself, "the Son of Man," to assert his divine authority. He is Lord even over the Sabbath instituted by God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 3)

hōste kurios estin ho huios tou anthrōpou kai tou sabbatou, "Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath" (NKJV) We might rephrase this as "The Son of Man is the Lord; he is also

Lord in respect to the Sabbath.” *kurios* is the most general term for any sort of prince, potentate, or king, but most often refers to the ruler to whom the speaker owes allegiance and obedience. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 3)

ho huios tou anthrōpou is Jesus’ favorite title for himself, which comes from Dan 7:13–14. The Son of Man is the Lord to whom is given all authority in heaven and earth. With that authority comes the right to declare any and all laws to have been met or fulfilled. It is on this basis that the New Testament, which is the Word of Jesus, supersedes the Old Testament (Col 2:16–17). In other words (that is, Paul’s words), “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (Rom 10:4 ESV). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 3)

The preacher must take care not to give the impression that the Church, or an individual Christian, is above the Law. This path leads to antinomianism, which Luther and the Lutheran Confessions clearly condemned (see FC SD V 15). The only person above the Law of God is God himself. Even so, Christ in his role as the Son of Man is the supreme Lawgiver and Law-fulfiller for every divine law (Mt 5:17). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 3)

2:23–28 When the Pharisees accuse Jesus’ disciples of violating the Sabbath, Jesus uses the opportunity to claim divine authority and assert His messianic status. Sadly, there are people today who still level criticisms like the Pharisees of old, criticizing Jesus’ followers because they really wish to criticize the authority and status of the Lord. But neither Jesus nor His Church can be dismissed. Through these same disciples, Jesus would spread the good news of peace, rest, and comfort. • Lord, defend Your people from those who hate You and would therefore do harm to Your Church. Help the Church to see that the battle is Yours and that You can do all things. Amen. (TLSB)