

Never Off Duty . . . Always On Call

Mark 2:1-17

Introduction

Usually when a person becomes popular; when something they are doing begins to succeed – a ministry or an occupation or whatever it might be – they become aloof and build walls around their life. They especially become more difficult to reach by those who would be considered “common people”.

However, when we look at the life of Jesus Christ, as His ministry begins to pick up pace; as people begin to find out more about who He is and begin to flock to Him, we find that Jesus Christ is still totally available. In our study today, I want to give several instances in which we see the availability of Jesus Christ. Like a good soldier, He is never off duty. Like a good doctor, He is always on call.

Now, in the Gospel of Mark:

- chapter 1, that we just completed, the critics remained silent and just kind of murmured a little;
- chapter 2, the critics will come out of their shells a little more and will question the disciples, but not Jesus directly;
- chapter 3, the persecution will begin, and from that point to the cross, they will begin to plot Jesus’ death.

Today, we will look at Mark, chapter 2, in which the critics will only go as far as questioning Jesus’ disciples. In spite of the persecution that is about to intensify, however, Jesus Christ is totally available.

Let this thought run through your mind as we go through this passage today. Jesus Christ is completely available to you and to me, just as He was to them.

Jesus is Available in His Teaching

Notice first, that Jesus was available in His teaching. We will begin by looking at Mark 2:1.

When He had come back to Capernaum several days afterward, it was heard that He was at home.

People began spreading the news.

This could literally read, “He was in *His* house.” That was confusing to me because I thought that Jesus did not have a place to lay His head. Jesus said,

. . . The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head. (Matthew 8:20; Luke 9:58)

He meant, however, that Jesus Himself did not have a permanent residence. Evidently in Capernaum, someone had allowed Him to use their house and that was where He stayed as His base of operation.

So Jesus had returned to His house and everyone heard that news. Look at Mark 2:2.

And many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room, not even near the door; . . .

Now, I had to study a little about the homes in Palestine. I discovered that in the homes of wealthier people, there would be a doorway that led into a foyer and then, from that foyer, the inside of the house would develop.

The homes of poorer people, however, had a door, but no foyer. In fact, the door of these homes opened right out onto the street. In the mornings, it was their custom to open the door. This was an open invitation

for others to come and go as they pleased. Among the common people, it was only when someone wanted strict privacy that they would close their door.

Evidently, the door was open in the home that Jesus Christ was in. So there are people coming into the house. In fact, there are so many that they spill out onto the street.

As I thought about the way they used to open their doors, and in fact, that some of these people did not even have a door, so it was always open, I decided I like closed doors. I especially like the door leading into the living room. It is amazing what you can do in the time it takes someone to come from their car to knock on your door! You can let the cat out, stuff toys under the couch, vacuum the floor, tuck your shirttail in, and then, open the door and say, "Oh, what a surprise! If I'd only known you were coming, I would have tidied up."

I like closed doors, but in this area at this time, there was no such thing. The doors were all open.

Continue to Mark 2:2b.

. . . and He was speaking the word to them.

Now, as we studied the life of Christ in Mark, chapter 1, we found Him teaching the word in the synagogue. In chapter 2, we find Him preaching the word in the doorway of a house. He will continually teach the word.

Do not make the mistake of thinking that because He healed so often, He had come to earth to heal. Jesus came to present the kingdom program; to preach the opportunity for salvation. He would heal as well, in order to prove that He was Jesus Christ, the Son of God. We will, in fact, see an example of this in a moment. However, Jesus Christ came to teach and was available to these people in His teaching.

Jesus is Available in His Healing

Notice, secondly, Jesus was available in His healing. Look at Mark 2:3-4, which is a very familiar passage.

And they came, bringing to Him a paralytic, carried by four men. Being unable to get to Him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above Him; and when they had dug an opening, they let down the pallet on which the paralytic was lying.

Now, these homes were constructed in such a way that the roofs were literally, beams laid from wall to wall about three feet apart. In the middle of the

beams, there would be limestone slabs that were about three feet by three feet. On top of that, a mixture of brush and clay would be packed in for insulation. There would then be sod covering it all. As a result, these homes usually had a flourishing crop of grass on their roofs.

In order to get into this house through the roof, these four men had to pull the dirt off and dig a hole to get to the limestone slabs. They had to pull two or three of the slabs off, which would have been six or nine feet. Then, they could let down the poor man's mattress of straw that had sticks running through each side and ropes attached to the stick poles. They lowered this paralytic man down into the middle of the room.

Now notice, according to verse 6, the crowd in this home is made up of the doctors of the Law, or the scribes. In that day, the rabbis believed that you were hideously sick if you had been a hideous sinner. Sickness was, in fact, the hand of God on a person, so sickness and sin were inseparable in their minds. These doctors of the Law had ostracized this man from society because he was paralyzed; he was "paralutikos," which is the Greek word from which we get our English word "paralyzed".

I have often viewed this story from the vantage point of the onlooker, but imagine how this paralytic felt that day. He was lowered down in the middle of his accusers, and I doubt he was ever more embarrassed in his life. He was paralyzed, so perhaps his arms had fallen off the sides of his pallet and dangled awkwardly. Perhaps his head was rolled strangely to the side and he was drooling a bit. His mind was alert, but his body was emaciated and weak. He could probably feel the gaze of the scribes on him, with their condemning thoughts.

Three things Jesus says to the paralytic

Jesus Christ said three things to this paralytic that we need to note.

1. First, in Mark 2:5, note the word,

. . . Son . . .

This is translated "child". The Greek word is "teknon," which means, "little child". It was an affectionate term used by a mother for a child or a father for a son. Jesus looked down on this man, who was probably paralyzed not only in his physical state,

but with fear, and said, “Child,” with all the compassion of an available Savior.

2. Secondly, we are told by Matthew, in Matthew 9:2, that Jesus also said,

. . . Take courage . . .

There are two words in the original language for the word that is translated, “courage”.

The first is the word for courage that has the idea of a person who is scared to death. I have had times, and perhaps you have had instances, in which I was so afraid and had to drum up the courage to do whatever I had to do.

In my home, as a young boy, there was a garage connected to our basement. Many times my parents would send me or one of my three brothers to the garage to get something from the freezer in the corner. If my younger brother Tim chickened out, it would usually be me. They might send us to get a half gallon of ice cream or something that we wanted so badly that we would do anything! I can remember, as a little lad, time and time again, going down to that basement, with the cold tile floor, and opening the door to that garage, to face pitch darkness. I would grope a little to try to find the light switch, while waiting to be pounced on by some bogeyman or something! Finally, I would find the light switch, but the light would only reach so far and the corners were always still dark. So, I would run to that freezer, flick open the door, grab that half gallon of ice cream, turn around, and run back!

We also had an attic that was always dark. To me, in fact, it seemed like another universe up there. I knew that eyes were peering at me!

In order to drum up the courage to survive going to the garage or attic, I would begin to whistle. Perhaps you have done something like that. It is hard to whistle when your lips are trembling! You can only get a little air out. But I was drumming up the courage to make it through. I was filled with fear.

The other Greek word that is used for courage is of one who is without fear. This is one who has courage because they have absolutely no fear at all. They have no need to whistle or hum because they have no fear.

This is the word that Jesus Christ used in speaking to the paralytic. He said, “Take courage, child . . .” or, in other words, “There is absolutely no reason to fear, child . . .”.

The man’s accusers were there. He knew that he was a defiled person in their presence. Jesus said to him, “Take heart; take courage, there is no need to fear.”

3. Then, thirdly, in Mark 2:5, Jesus looked at him and in the same breath, said,

. . . your sins are forgiven.

Jesus is Available to His Critics

Now Jesus was also available to His critics. Look at Mark 2:8a.

Immediately Jesus, aware in His spirit that they [the scribes – the critics] were reasoning that way within themselves, . . .

These scribes, or critics, thought, according to Mark 2:7,

Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?

They had a law, by the way, for a person who blasphemed. The scribes would hang him from a tree, stone him, cut the rope, and then, bury him in shame.

So, in Mark 2:8b,

Immediately Jesus, . . . said to them, “Why are you reasoning about these things in your hearts?”

I love His response. We cannot pass this by. Do you know that a good test for you and for me is in the way we face criticism? A good test of character is the way we respond when someone levels a criticism at our character.

We never find Jesus Christ getting all over these critics and saying, “What are you thinking that for?”

All that Jesus says, as recorded in Mark 2:8b-10a, is,

. . . “Why are you reasoning about these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven’; or to say, ‘Get up, and pick up your pallet and walk’? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” . . .

Remember this is the reason Jesus is healing. Continue to Mark 2:10b-11.

. . . – He said to the paralytic, “I say to you, get up, pick up your pallet and go home.”

We are then told, in Mark 2:12a,

And he got up and immediately picked up the pallet and went out in the sight of everyone . . .

Notice the stair steps of Jesus' logic. This was the way Jesus Christ was proving His point, and He was taking the rabbi's argument. The steps include:

1. no one can be healed unless forgiven;
2. only God can forgive sin;
3. the paralyzed man was healed;
4. Jesus did forgive his sins;
5. Jesus must be God.

It was an undeniable argument. The way Jesus dealt with His critics is fascinating.

And what a physician Jesus was! Imagine! He comes to the sick, gives a perfect diagnosis, presents a complete cure, and then, pays the bill. Wow! What a physician!

Now notice Mark 2:12b,

. . . they were all amazed and were glorifying God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this."

In other words, "Some strange things are happening here today."

Jesus is Available to the Outcasts

Notice that Jesus was available to the outcasts. Look at Mark 2:13-14a.

And He went out again by the seashore; and all the people were coming to Him, and He was teaching them. As He passed by, He saw Levi [Matthew] the son of Alphaeus sitting in the tax booth, . . .

Now, Capernaum was the intersection of many commercial roads. In fact, travel from Egypt to Galilee required going through Capernaum. It was the center and had a thriving economy.

Now, there were two classes of tax collectors. There was one class called the "Gabbai". These men would tax your property, your income, and other stated things. It was very difficult for these men to become wealthy because these were fixed taxes.

There was also a second class of tax collectors, or the "Mokhes". These men became very wealthy because they taxed everything they could touch. If someone caught a fish, they could not get down the road to their house without passing this tax collector, who had set up his collector's table at an intersection.

They would be taxed on that fish. If someone went shopping and bought some things, they would pay taxes on those things to this collector. Because there were no stated tax amounts on such items, these men became incredibly wealthy. It was a way to get rich quick.

There were also two kinds of "Mokhes". There was the great "Mokhes". He would hire someone to sit at the collector's table for him because he was worried about his reputation. These Jews had bought the tax collection right from the Roman government and were considered traitors. They did not want anyone to know that they were a part of this, so the great "Mokhes" would hire someone.

The little "Mokhes" was too cheap and too greedy to hire anyone. He had to sit at the table himself because he did not want a middle man.

Notice what we are told in Mark 2:14 about Matthew,

. . . Levi [Matthew] . . . sitting in the tax booth . . .

He was a little "Mokhes". Matthew was cheap and greedy. He did not care about his reputation. He could not care less if you leveled your finger at him and said, "Don't you realize, as a Jew, you're a traitor to us?"

Matthew was in it for the money. He was a little "Mokhes". Yet, we find Jesus Christ coming to him and saying, in Mark 2:14b,

. . . "Follow Me!" And he [Matthew] got up and followed Him.

Jesus is Available to the Needy World

Now, finally, Jesus Christ was available to the needy world. Notice what Matthew does, as recorded in Mark 2:15,

And it happened He was reclining at the table in his house, and many tax collectors and sinners were dining with Jesus and His disciples; for there were many of them, and they were following Him.

Your translation may use the word "publican," which was the general term for tax collectors. This term "publican" was used of "one who did public duty". Matthew was a publican.

As you study through the gospels, you realize that publicans were as bad as Gentiles in the Jewish mind. They were scum. In fact, look at Mark 2:16,

When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that He was eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they said to His disciples, “Why is He eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners?”

In other words, the critics said, “How does He eat with people of the soil; dirty people? How can He associate with them?”

The clue is in Mark 2:17.

And hearing this, Jesus said to them, “It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

Jesus Christ was at a feast and, I believe, this was Matthew’s resignation dinner. Matthew called all of his friends together and had a guest speaker up his sleeve – namely, Jesus. He was going to resign publicly. He was going to tell all of his tax collector friends and all of the crowd that he ran with that he was quitting his job. He was going to follow this man, Jesus. So Matthew gathered all of these people and a feast was prepared.

Now, Jesus Christ was right in the middle of them. In fact, they were not sitting, they were reclining. They would rest on their left elbow and would face the food. This was a sign of intimacy. If you ate a meal with another individual, it meant that you were close friends.

What was Jesus doing at this gathering? Jesus stated, “I didn’t come to call the righteous – they don’t need Me. I’m a physician. I don’t make house calls on the well – they don’t need Me. I go to the sick – they need Me.”

I remember reading a story told by Hugh Redwood, an old preacher from England. The story was of a woman who lived in the dock district of London. She lived with a Chinese man and they had, what was called back then, a half-cast baby; a half-breed. She was an outcast to society.

This woman heard of a lady’s Bible study. She decided to go and, in fact, brought her baby with her. She enjoyed it so much that she came back week after week. Finally, however, after a month or two, the Vicar came to her and said, “Ma’am, I do not want you to return.”

The woman looked at the Vicar with questions in her eyes. He went ahead and provided the answer, “If you keep coming, these women will never come back to this church.”

Her eyes filled with tears and the woman said to the Vicar, “I know I’m a sinner, but isn’t there anywhere that a sinner can go?”

In Jesus’ time, there was a place that sinners could go – they could go to Jesus.

I fear, ladies and gentlemen, that we throw up our sanctuaries and start all of our programs and then say, “If you want Him, come to us. But if you come, act like us; look like us; be like us.”

We have missed the point. When I study the availability of Jesus Christ, it is mind-boggling. If He lived in the twentieth century, I think we would spurn Him too.

Application

Let me give some timeless truths that we need to apply from the availability of Jesus Christ. They are very simple and yet, profound.

1. First, Jesus Christ is available to you when you admit you need Him.

It is as simple as that – Jesus is available. Have you ever told Him that you wanted Him? The question is, “Will you accept Him?”

Jesus is available. He, in fact, died for you; His blood was shed for you. If you realize, perhaps even today, that you need Him, I have great news – He is available.

2. Secondly, Jesus Christ is available to others when you are willing to serve Him.

I went back through this passage and was amazed at some things that began to come out of the text that are true for me and for you. I suggest that you read a passage over and over and over again. It will seem as if you see something new every time.

It was fascinating to me that the possibility of Jesus Christ’s ministry was because others, who followed Him, would serve Him. Think of some of the examples.

Someone loaned a house to Jesus and yet, that person is never introduced. We do not know who they were.

There were men who patched the roof and yet, we never hear of them. I have a feeling they probably did not patch that roof for a couple of months. They

probably invited people in and said, “Look! There it is! He came right through that hole, right down here, and Jesus healed him.” Those men who toiled and cleaned up were never introduced.

There were women, and perhaps men, who prepared the feast given to Matthew’s friends and yet, we never see them in the text. They were busy preparing for this feast, thinking, “Jesus is going to be here. He’s going to share the gospel of the kingdom and we’re going to serve to make it possible.”

I love the truth of these hidden servants that we never see. Because they were willing to serve Him, Jesus Christ is available to others.

So, the question is, “If you know Him, will you serve Him?”

I remember reading a story that occurred just after World War II. Europe was left to pick up the pieces and one of the most tragic aftermaths was the thousands of orphaned children who roamed the streets starving to death. In the story, a GI was going back to his barracks in London. He turned the corner in his jeep and saw a little orphan boy. This rag-tag kid was looking through the window of a pastry shop

with his nose pressed against the glass. He was salivating as he watched the man knead the dough, put together donuts, put them into the oven, and then, take them out piping hot and place them in the window, right in front of his nose. The GI screeched to a halt, got out of his jeep, went to the little boy, and said, “Hey, would you like some?”

The little kid said, “Yeah, sure would!”

The GI goes into the donut shop, buys a dozen, comes out, and hands them to the little boy. He turns and walks away and then, he feels a tug on his jacket. There is that little boy looking up at him, and he says, “Mister, are you God?”

The truth is, ladies and gentlemen, Jesus Christ has come and He is totally available. He needs those who claim Him to be little Christ’s, or Christians – that is your name.

Have you made it possible for someone to sit at the feast table? Have you made it possible for someone to hear? Can people look at you and say, “You must be from God,” because you are available to them?

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