

Mark 2:18-3:6

This week I wanted to do things maybe a little differently as we get started in our study. I want to just point you back to the last few sections that we looked at in the gospel of Mark and point out to you that Jesus was working to minister to those who were considered the religious elite.

Back in chapter 1 when the Lord was reaching out with compassion to the paralytic we saw that as this man was healed Jesus told him to go to the priest and to offer for his cleansing that which Moses commanded. If you remember when this man did this it would have been a testimony to the religious establishment that someone amazing and with authority had come on the scene. I believe that they then in response to this sent people from Jerusalem to then investigate what it was that Jesus was about.

Then as we came into chapter 2 the Lord was seen in a house and there were four friends who came bearing a friend of theirs who was a paralytic. They found that the home was too full to enter and rather than going home they went up on the roof, chopped a hole in it and let their friend down through the hole.

When this man was in front of Jesus remember that He did not heal the man immediately but instead Jesus made a statement that this man's sins were forgiven. We are told that there were scribes who were in that home watching these things unfold and when they heard Jesus say this the natural conclusion they came to was that Jesus was claiming to be God and what He was saying was therefore blasphemy.

Of course they were wrong and then the Lord spoke saying that He was going to heal the man physically as evidence that what He said about forgiveness He also had the authority to perform. We then saw the paralytic rise, take his mat and head home.

Then at the end of our study last week we looked at a man named Levi who is also known as Matthew and he was a tax collector and if you remember we talked about how despised he would have been among his own people as they labeled him a traitor who was now working for the Romans. The Lord as He saw Levi then spoke to him simply saying "Follow Me" and Levi we are told got up right away and left all following Jesus.

After this Matthew was in his home and he was having a meal with all of his friends and Jesus and his disciples came to that meal and were partaking of it...and again we saw the religious people as they watched Jesus doing this question why was it that Jesus would eat with sinners...and Jesus gave that famous line when he said "Those who are well don't need a physician but those who are sick"...And then He said "I did not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance"

One of the things I want you to notice as we work our way through Mark's Gospel is that Jesus I believe had a great love for those who were religious and at the same time He was much harder on them than He was anyone else. The reason for that was the religious crowd had the idea that everyone was to follow their example, that they knew more than everyone else, that they were spiritually the ones that were doing the best...Jesus though knew that the reality was they were indeed spiritually sick and in need of a physician and because He

loved them He confronted them over and over again in the hopes they would understand the need to change in their lives.

Let me just give you a few examples that demonstrate how hard Jesus was on them. First listen to a parable that Jesus told from Luke 18:9-14 which says ⁹**Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:** ¹⁰**“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.** ¹¹**The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men— extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector.** ¹²**I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’** ¹³**And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise *his* eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’** ¹⁴**I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be ^[d]humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”** In this case the Lord was hammering home the fact that the best place to be is in a place of humility and certainly the religious leaders had very little of that when you look through the Gospels.

Matthew 23 is a whole chapter that is dedicated to Jesus confronting the scribes and Pharisees...This is where Jesus famously called them hypocrites numerous times...Matthew 23:25-26 as an example says ²⁵**“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and ^[u]self-indulgence.** ²⁶**Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also.**

You might look at all Jesus had to say to these men and think that he hated them, that He had no room for them in His heart and just to balance that out I would encourage you to read John 3...That's the story of Nicodemus who was a Pharisee, a ruler of the Jews and He came to Jesus with a heart that was wanting to know the truth...and Jesus knowing this let him know that anyone that wanted to see the kingdom of God would need to be born again not of the flesh but of the Spirit. Jesus loved this man and ministered to Him pointing him to the truth of who He was. Later on Nicodemus is one of two that came and sought the body of Jesus from the cross after His death. I believe because of what happened in John 3 that the trajectory of this man's life was completely changed.

So we shouldn't think that Jesus hated those who were religious but instead that He hated what they stood for and how far away from the heart of God they were and how they kept people from coming to follow the God of Israel by faith.

So with all that in mind let's look at 3 narratives again this week in the life of Jesus and we will see that He does indeed minister to those who were considered religious each time.

Look at verse 18 with me which says **18The disciples of John and of the Pharisees were fasting. Then they came and said to Him, "Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?"**

So here we have both the disciples of John and the Pharisees that were watching the disciples of Jesus and they noticed that the disciples of Jesus never fasted while they did so regularly and naturally they came and asked Jesus why this was.

Just to give you some information we know that the Pharisees actually took it upon themselves to fast twice each week and as you study the Gospels Jesus actually speaks against how they were fasting over in Matthew 6:16-18 if you listen to that it says ¹⁶ **“Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the ^[e]hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. ¹⁷ But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you ^[f]openly.**

So what the Pharisees would do is they would walk around and make a big scene and everyone in town knew that they were fasting...The heart of God wasn't about the outward demonstrations of a person that is fasting but instead looked at the heart and motivation of a person that was fasting.

In the law which are the first 5 books of the Bible there was actually only one day that the people of God were required to fast and it was the Day of Atonement. What the people did though was they had added to that and made multiple occasions to fast and we saw some of that in the book of Jeremiah I believe and in the book of Ezra.

Fasting in itself wasn't a bad thing at all and in fact sometimes its good for us to fast and to just define fasting it is simply putting something you love to the side to seek the Lord and put Him first in your life...So you could fast from food, or electronics or you could choose to abstain from anything that you truly enjoy and when we fast we should be looking not to twist God's arm because of our efforts but

instead to say Lord I'm focusing on you and I want to be in your will and I want you to help me to just be right where you want me in life...Or you might fast for a specific situation you are facing in life and just be asking the Lord to help you with it.

I might add that fasting does not always have to be for self...It can also be for those who are suffering and struggling and you can look at Isaiah 58 for more about fasting.

When it comes to John's disciples we should just understand that John's ministry was to prepare others for the coming of the Messiah and his teaching and focus were to point out the sins of the people and help them recognize that they had a big problem on their hands in that they had sin that needed to be healed and ministered to...So as they fasted they were doing so again in preparation for the Lord who was going to come.

The disciples of Jesus however didn't practice fasting at all and so these other two groups are suffering away and they are thinking these disciples and Jesus were inferior to them for their lack of fasting.

Now watch how Jesus responds if you look at verses 19-20 which say **19 And Jesus said to them, "Can the ^[e]friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast. 20 But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days.** In responding Jesus was likening himself to the bridegroom in a wedding and those who followed Him as His friends. We do find from time to time that God will call Himself the bridegroom of His people and we have Hosea 2:14-20 as an example

of that...The reality is that Jesus is looking for a bride to take as His own and the church fills that space today.

So what Jesus is saying here as He uses this picture of a wedding is that if you went to a wedding and were a friend of the bridegroom it was no time to fast and mourn. A wedding was perhaps one of the greatest times of celebration in all the land of Israel. The wedding feast would typically last 7 days and during that time the rabbis actually taught that those in the wedding weren't to have any burdens placed on them and that enjoying the time of the wedding was more important than even religious observations.

I've been to a few weddings in my life and every one of them has been a joyous occasion especially for the bride and the groom.

So Jesus is saying that while He is here it is not time to wallow around in mourning but instead to rejoice and have a great time...and then there was a sobering statement attached to that when He says one day the bridegroom will be taken away and then they will fast. You can imagine those terrible three days that Jesus was in the tomb. The disciples who had so much joy and hope and expectation and then suddenly it was all taken away in a moment.

This reminds me of what Jesus said to the disciples in John 16:20 which says ²⁰ **Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy.** The day Jesus rose and showed Himself to the disciples would have been an incredible day indeed.

And then Jesus had some additional words for those who had come asking Jesus this question when He said what we have in verses 21-22 which say ²¹ **No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; or else the new piece pulls away from the old, and the tear is made worse.** ²² **And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine bursts the wineskins, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins.**”

Let's first look at this from a physical viewpoint and as we do that I think we can then develop this into what Jesus was trying to convey spiritually to those that were questioning Him.

Here we have two small quick pictures that are given to us and both of them are quite similar. First we have a garment and this garment had a hole in it that needed to be mended and Jesus simply states that you would never take a new piece of fabric that had never been washed and sew it on to an older garment that had been washed repeatedly.

If you were doing that and you had old jeans and you took a new piece of fabric that had never been washed and put it on those jeans you would then have a problem for when it was washed the new fabric would then shrink creating a defect in the jeans...Perhaps you might remember how when you bought shirts and pants as kids at the store that you would always buy them a little large so that when they were washed they would then shrink and fit properly.

The second example we have is of a new and an old wineskin and the thought was similar. When you had a new wineskin the skin itself was a lot more flexible and when you put the unfermented new wine in it

as the wine fermented it would give off gases and cause the skin to expand and in the process it would become brittle.

And if you took new wine and you put it in a brittle wineskin as that wine expanded it would cause the skin to burst leaving you with nothing.

So how does that apply to those that Jesus was speaking to? Well I think the Lord was saying to the Pharisees and John's disciples that if they wanted to have a right and true relationship with God, if they wanted to enter into the joy of having a relationship with Him like His disciples were then they were going to have to walk away from the old ways and become a new garment or a new wineskin in order to be able to handle what was offered through His life.

If you remember in the Old Testament in Jeremiah 31:31-33 there was a pronouncement of the new covenant that would one day be found in the blood of Jesus and it says the following ³¹ **“Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—** ³² **not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, ^[h]though I was a husband to them, says the Lord.** ³³ **But this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their ^[i]hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.** The religious folks of the days of Jesus were still trying to relate to God based on keeping the law, based on their performance and their abilities... Jesus when He came brought a

whole new message with Him...A message that said the Word of God will be written on people's hearts and minds.

To accept the Lord Jesus the religious of this world will need to leave behind all their abilities and accomplishments and embrace the cross...The cross says Jesus has the victory in Him and we need only to come to Him in faith. Keeping the law was never intended to save someone but instead we learn in the book of Galatians that the law is a tutor that brings us to Christ.

So the religious people they looked at themselves and they looked at how hard they tried to keep the law and they believed that it was enough to get them into heaven. The Gospel of Jesus Christ though says this if you listen to Ephesians 2:8-9 which says ⁸**For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, ⁹not of works, lest anyone should boast.**

To sum this up you could never take the old religious practices and then try to put Jesus into those for His life and ministry will explode the old...the old ways just can't contain the goodness of Jesus. Jesus cannot be taken and smashed into religious ideals or practices...if you are going to know Him and serve Him you must do so on His terms. Those who were religious couldn't keep going the same way they were instead they needed to trade in the old wineskins for the new ones. In both of these examples the old and the new simply don't go together.

I would say also just briefly that you and I practically speaking as believers in Jesus need to work to be a new wineskin and not an old one. I believe very firmly that Jesus is looking for those that will just remain flexible and willing to do what He desires to accomplish in our lives. Sometimes that may mean that the Spirit will lead us in new

ways or through different methods...Keep in mind that as the Spirit leads He will never go against what His Word has already spoken.

Let's move on here if you look at verses 23-24 which say ²³ **Now it happened that He went through the grainfields on the Sabbath; and as they went His disciples began to pluck the heads of grain.** ²⁴ **And the Pharisees said to Him, "Look, why do they do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?"**

We are told here that it was the Sabbath and Jesus and His disciples were walking through the grainfields and as they went they began to pluck the heads of grain and they were surely eating them as they did so...and then we see that the Pharisees show up and they are asking why these guys are breaking the Sabbath as they are doing this.

So we look at this and we are like what's the big deal and we might think that these guys were being accused of stealing the crops of another persons property but I want you to just know that there was actually a provision in the law of God over in Deuteronomy 23:25 that said you were allowed to partake of the crops of another...that didn't mean you could go and harvest a half an acre and take it home but you were allowed to take and eat small amounts as you had need.

So what did they mean when they said they were breaking the Sabbath? First let's just define what the Sabbath was supposed to be...It was to be a day of rest, a day to reflect on your relationship with God, a day not to have to work but to instead enjoy some time without the need to always be busy...Sadly what happened though is the people began to ask some questions and they would say "well what do you think the definition of work is?" And then the religious people would come and define what it meant when the Word of God said you

couldn't work and at this time they had all kinds of rules and regulations attached to the Sabbath. In the times of Jesus they had at least 39 rules and these rules were broken down into all kinds of sub categories.

And so what had happened over time is the Sabbath had become a great burden and in this case the disciples had broken four of the man made rules that had been put in place. Picking the grain was considered harvesting or reaping, rubbing the grain together separating the chaff from the wheat was considered threshing,, blowing the chaff away was like winnowing and finally the whole process was considered to be food preparation.

For the Pharisees this was kind of like a GOTCHA moment and I'm not even sure where these guys were the whole time for they are just showing up suddenly on the scene here like some little prairie dogs popping up suddenly out of nowhere.

Even today the Sabbath remains a great religious stumbling block for the Jewish people as they continue to make rules to define what is keeping the Sabbath and what is not keeping the Sabbath. For example you can't drive a car on the Sabbath because when you drive there are sparks that combust the fuel which is considered to be starting a fire which cannot be done on the Sabbath. You also can't write or plant anything on the Sabbath and you can't use any electrical appliances...Even using a light switch is considered a violation of the Sabbath though you can use timers to automatically turn lights off and on. Even elevators have a special Sabbath mode on them so you don't have to press the button of the floor you need to get to...When Sabbath mode is activated the elevator simply stops at every floor.

And I don't share all this with you to make fun of anyone or put down the Jewish people who do observe the Sabbath but simply to demonstrate to you that even today the Sabbath has an enormous amount of religious regulation attached to it.

So again the religious people challenge Jesus and He responds in verses 25-28 which say ²⁵ **But He said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he was in need and hungry, he and those with him: ²⁶ how he went into the house of God *in the days of* Abiathar the high priest, and ate the showbread, which is not lawful to eat except for the priests, and also gave some to those who were with him?"**

²⁷ **And He said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. ²⁸ Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath."**

David was certainly one of the most respected individuals in the Jewish culture and the Lord actually uses what happened with him as an example to respond to them. I'm not sure if you remember this but David at one point in his life had to run from Saul for Saul was going to kill him and as he ran he ended up in a place called Nob where he ran into a priest named Ahimelech who was the father of Abiathar. David asked for some food and all this priest had was some leftover showbread from the temple...This bread was changed out weekly and when it was changed the priests had permission to eat it. When David asked for food to eat all this priest had was this bread and we then see him giving it to David and he and his men ate it.

The point that's being made here by Jesus is that human need was more important than the law...The Sabbath was supposed to be a day

of blessing for the Jewish people but instead it had become a constant burden to the people to have to keep it. The Sabbath was supposed to be for man not man for the Sabbath...So Jesus uses this old testament example to simply show those who were accusing that they had it wrong.

And then Jesus said that He Himself was the Lord of the Sabbath meaning he was saying He was the authority when it came to what the Sabbath was and what it was not. Essentially Jesus is saying “look guys” I kind of invented the Sabbath and so what I say about it is how things are going to be...Again this would have been a big statement to make in front of those who were religious and simply said this only gave them more motivation to come against Jesus.

Now quickly here let's just address a question that comes up in our Christian lives from time to time and that is should you and I as New Testament believers keep the Sabbath? There are some that will say that if you want to be a “REAL” Christian that you need to keep the Sabbath and some believe that because they keep the Sabbath they are more close to the Lord than others.

Let me share a few things with you and first I would encourage you for homework to go and read Acts 15 and this is where there was a big disagreement about whether someone needed to be circumcised in order to be saved and Paul and Barnabas actually went to Jerusalem to the leaders of the church and they asked them this and as they discussed it they came to a conclusion that the believers should do a few things which included keeping away from things sacrificed to idols, things strangled and sexual immorality and if they did just these

things they would do well...So the point is there was no emphasis placed at all or even mentioned that they should keep the Sabbath.

You can also for homework take a look at Colossians 2:16-19 and Romans 14:4-7. I think you can read the New Testament as a whole and find very little support for believers needing to keep the Sabbath...For me every day is the same as I worship and serve Jesus and celebrate what He has accomplished in my life.

Ok let's look at the third narrative of tonight if you look at verses 1-3 which say **And He entered the synagogue again, and a man was there who had a withered hand. ² So they watched Him closely, whether He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might ^[a]accuse Him. ³ And He said to the man who had the withered hand, ^[b]“Step forward.”** So again we have Jesus on a Sabbath day and this time he has gone from the fields to the synagogue and it is interesting that Jesus often congregated with those that had an interest in spiritual things.

While he was there I think that the religious people had placed a plant in that synagogue as there was an individual that had a withered hand. So he was disabled in some way and we are told that the religious people were watching to see if Jesus would heal the man not in order to learn more about Jesus or to make a decision that they might follow Him but notice it says here so that they might accuse Him...We probably look at that and immediately say What does that mean? Accuse Jesus of what healing a person? Why would that be a big deal?

Again we need to just understand the Sabbath laws that man had made and one of those laws said that you could protect a man's life

but you couldn't heal him or make him whole...So if someone was in an accident and they were bleeding you could put on a tourniquette but you couldn't apply the stitches to sew it up until the next day. You could set a man up in a bed if he broke a bone and get him out of harms way but to set the bone would have to wait until the next day...and so this man who had a withered hand according to tradition could not be made whole until the Sabbath ended...If Jesus didn't wait to heal him then he was breaking the Sabbath law and they would then be able to run to the higher ups and accuse Jesus.

And the religious people I think had learned that when Jesus came in the room the ones that He was drawn to were to ones that were hurting the most...I kind of think Jesus had a knack and a heart for the lowly in spirit...He could pick them out and see them and rather than go to the crowd he would go for the individual.

Perhaps today you are the individual that most needs a touch from Jesus in this room tonight and I am happy to tell you that Jesus is ready and willing to work in you and minister to you if you will just come to Him...Perhaps for a long time you have been trying to keep it together and you are realizing that you don't have the answers and you don't know where to turn I want you to know that Jesus has great concern for your life and for you individually...Jesus wants to love on you if you will just come to Him.

Now Jesus knew the people were watching Him and He then calls this man with the withered hand to come forward and you know all those who were there were watching with an intensity.

Look at verses 4-5 which say ⁴Then He said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But

they kept silent. ⁵ And when He had looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts, He said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored ^[c]as whole as the other. So Jesus questions them and He asks which is lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil to save a life or to let someone die and of course any normal human would have to say that helping someone had to be something that God would approve of. Simply said there is never a wrong day to do a good deed.

I have to just mention that if an animal was in a situation where they were dying you were allowed to go and take care of that animal and yet when it came to their fellow humans the standards weren't the same...In all honesty what Jesus is saying is that your methods and rules don't make sense.

And notice that they all remained silent...no one had an answer for Jesus and then we are told that He became angry...You don't see Jesus angry all that often and yet to see their hard hearts towards the well being of this individual was just wrong in the mind and heart of Jesus and then we are told that his anger moved him to grief as he was grieved at their hardness of heart.

How sad for Jesus to look at the religious leaders and they should have been the example for others and yet they weren't they were keeping people from the goodness of God rather than helping them to see Him...Jesus was grieved and I think even today Jesus is grieved by those who claim they are religious and yet they are all caught up in rules and regulations instead of grace and mercy...Surely there is a holy standard we should live up to as given in the Bible but when our

faith becomes legalistic we have lost sight of the truth of the freedom that we find in Jesus Christ.

And then you can imagine Jesus after looking around and he is both mad and grieved he simply looks at the man and says “Stretch out your hand” and we are told that he did so.

Again just understand that for a hand that is withered to begin to work again was a great miracle, you can imagine the joints and ligaments snap, crackle and popping as they once again became filled with strength and this man became whole.

Now you would think the critics would be silenced but look briefly at what happened in verse 6 which says **6Then the Pharisees went out and immediately plotted with the Herodians against Him, how they might destroy Him.** You can see here that the opposition to Jesus has certainly changed from what we saw at the beginning of chapter 2 when they were asking questions and observing Jesus to the point that now they are actively looking for a way to bring about the death of Jesus.

The Herodians were a group of individuals that actually approved of the Romans ruling over them and they loved Herod and these two groups were almost always against each other but here we see them on the same team and you will see that the Pharisees in particular are now going to be working to come against Jesus.

Well that's where we will stop for today and certainly I want to just encourage you not to be a religious Pharisee or scribe but instead to walk in a relationship with Jesus Christ...you know the religious of this world they think they have it together and they think their good works

will get them into heaven but the reality is that no one is good not one the Bible says and we all have need of a Savior in our lives and that Savior is Jesus Christ and His death on the cross and His resurrection and the Bible is clear if you just come to Jesus and you humble yourself and you recognize that you need Him to forgive you and you need a change in your life that you will be saved...**have you done that today in your life?** If you died right now could you say with certainty that you will be in heaven because of what Jesus has done for you on the cross and because He is your Lord and Savior? If not I just tell you that you need to come to Jesus and when we are finished tonight just come on forward and I'll pray with you and you can give your heart to the One that loves you so much that He died on the cross.

Let's pray.

Mark 2:18-3:6 "Lord of the Sabbath"

Cross References

Chapter 2

Introduction

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