

Mark 2:13-17

He went out again beside the sea, and all the crowd was coming to him, and he was teaching them. 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.

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. 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?" 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." Mark 2:13-17

MARK

- THE STORY OF JESUS -

PART 7 - THE INCEPTION OF CHRISTIAN CULTURE

Mark tells us three things about Christian culture ...

1. Jesus inaugurated a subversive counterculture
2. Cultural identity is not performance based
3. This counterculture is attractive

1. Jesus Inaugurated a Subversive Counterculture

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Subversive Counterculture

Subvert - Undermine the power and authority of (an established system or institution): late Middle English: from Old French subvertir or Latin subvertere, from sub- 'from below' + vertere 'to turn'

a culture with values and customs that are very different from and usually opposed to those accepted by most of society

Subculture

an ethnic, regional, economic, or social group exhibiting characteristic patterns of behaviour sufficient to distinguish it from others within an embracing culture or society

The Church Subculture

It is natural, therefore, that the church defends ... standards and the members embody them in their life style. This sets clear boundaries to the extent to which we can mix easily with those whose life styles are very different from ours. We quickly feel not only uneasy, but actually compromised. What is more we sense that the atmosphere in such settings may be inimical to our spiritual growth.

Yet if that becomes our dominant attitude, then we find ourselves increasingly cut off, especially in social rather than work contexts, from those who are different from us in not believing. The church develops an entire subculture of its own and is increasingly insulated from 'the world'. To that extent its witness and missionary effectiveness are diminished. D English

A Doctor Who Avoids Sick People?

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Evidence Your Christianity Has Become a Subculture

- You stay away from people who don't go to church because you are concerned about their effect on you
- You don't know many people who aren't Christians
- People who aren't Christians don't like to hang out with you
- You rarely, if ever, talk about Jesus with unchurched people
- You are judgemental about the behaviour of people who aren't Christians
- You aren't comfortable about talking to people about Jesus unless you have the home ground advantage

Subversively Dealing With Sin

One woman had just become a Christian and joined the congregation. She was around 40 years old and divorced. She didn't know much about the faith. She was always living with somebody or other; that was just the way she lived. She came to me for a year or so because she was trying to get her life in order, and I was teaching her how to pray. Sometimes I'd listen to her and think, Should I say something about her sexual lifestyle? She's in church every Sunday. She knows what I believe. She's got to know something about the Ten Commandments. But somehow I never felt I should say anything. After about a year, I said to her, "Would you do something for me?" She said, "Sure. What do you want me to do?" "Would you live celibate for six months?" "Why would I do that?" she asked. I said, "I'm not going to give you any reasons. I just think I know you pretty well, and we're trying to figure out how to live this Christian life. Just do it. Do it for me." She said, "Well, I don't see the point of it. But yeah." She started to live celibate. After two or three months, she said to me, "Thank you for that. I have never felt so free. I didn't know you could live this way. I know the Bible says something about it, but I thought times had changed so much that you couldn't do this. I don't know anybody who lives this way. Thank you. This is wonderful. Things are coming together for me." She thought she was coming to me to bless her in her life the way she was; at some point it seemed right to interfere with that. Thankfully, I waited long enough, so the Seventh Commandment became a word of freedom to her rather than some kind of oppression. Eugene Peterson

2. Cultural Identity is Not Performance Based

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The Scribes

- You are somebody because of what you do.
- How do we act like the scribes?
 - By saying that this message would be really good for someone I know
 - I have this squared away but they really need to hear it
 - By reading through the bible with theological grids so that it says what we want it to say rather than what it says
 - By emphasizing knowledge rather than obedience and love
 - The fruit of the spirit needs to grow alongside the gifts of the spirit – why do you think that 1 Corinthians 13 exists – the fruit was not there

Tim Chester

The teachers of the law created a system that allowed them to feel superior, and then lifted not one finger to help others. Think how this might play out today. Today's Pharisees might condemn the poor for their dysfunctional families, but lift not one finger to help. Today's Pharisees might condemn the poor for their excessive drinking, but lift not one finger to ease their pain. Today's Pharisees might condemn the poor for their laziness, but lift not one finger to provide employment. Today's Pharisees might condemn the poor for their abortions, but lift not one finger to adopt unwanted children. I'm not defending dysfunctional families, drunkenness, and so on. But we can't condemn these things at a distance. That's legalism. We must come alongside, proclaiming and demonstrating the transforming grace of God.

Are You Good Enough to Go to Church?

Jesus is handing out God's party invitations. They read: "You're invited to my party in the new creation. Come as you are." The religious leaders agreed there was a party and an invitation and even that it was possible to attend. But when the religious leaders passed out the invitation, they didn't say, "Come as you are." They said, "You've got to get changed; you've got to get cleaned up." As a result people didn't come, because they didn't think they were good enough. Tim Chester

3. This Counterculture is Attractive

- 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. Mark 2:15
- “I like your Christ. I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.” Mahatma Gandhi

Tim Chester

We can't do our work of pointing sinners to the Saviour unless we spend time with them. The first thing Levi does after following Jesus is to throw a party. Maybe like Levi you introduced Jesus to your friends when you first became a Christian. But after a while you lost contact with those friends. Perhaps the church schedule left little time. Perhaps your new behaviour made it hard to hang out with old friends. Perhaps you were warned of the influence they might have on you. But those who avoid the contamination of sinners are like the Pharisees. Those who earn the label "friend of sinners" are like their Saviour.

- Freeloader week

NT Scholar Scott Bartchy

It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of table fellowship for the cultures of the Mediterranean basin in the first century of our era. Mealtimes were far more than occasions for individuals to consume nourishment. Being welcomed at a table for the purpose of eating food with another person had become a ceremony richly symbolic of friendship, intimacy and unity. Thus betrayal or unfaithfulness toward anyone with whom one had shared the table was viewed as particularly reprehensible. On the other hand, when persons were estranged, a meal invitation opened the way to reconciliation.

Robert Karris

“In Luke’s Gospel Jesus got himself killed because of the way he ate.”

The Marriage Supper of the Lamb

- God will finally sit down with sinners and eat with them
- This is foretaste of the messianic banquet at the end of time and people want to be with Jesus
 - Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, “Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure”— for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” Rev 19:6-9