

Mark: A Servant on a Mission
The Call to Conversion

Introduction: Today we move to the second half of the section that we started with last week. It is a section that contains five narratives, two of which we addressed last week.

- These five narratives (as we noted last week) all took place in Galilee and are part of what leads the religious leaders to seek to put Jesus to death
- These are balanced by five narratives (11:27-12:37) that have the same effect and take place in Jerusalem
- They all reveal the radical intrusion of Jesus into the world with the focus of transformation

First Narrative—(2:1-12)—the lame man let down in the midst of the crowd in the house where Jesus was teaching. He forgave his sins first and then led him being a paralytic.

1. It is possible to be truly whole only when the breach occasioned by sin has been healed through the forgiveness of Jesus Christ.
2. The verification of our forgiveness (justification) is the miracle of the resurrection. (He raised him up.)

Second Narrative—(2:13-17)—the calling of Levi, the tax collector to follow Jesus and the ensuing banquet at his home.

3. Christ calls people out of their deep darkness, their utter loneliness, and their most frightful circumstances and offers forgiveness to them.
4. Christ does recognize the distinction between the (self) righteous and the hopeless sinner, shaping His mission and extending His forgiveness to the one who recognizes their own sinfulness and hopelessness.

First Two Narratives deal with the reason He came
Last Three Narratives deal with the conversion He demands

Conversion: the process of change from one thing to another

Now—we move to the 3rd narrative of this section in His Galilean ministry (2:18-22)

- The issue now turns to fasting and Sabbath keeping

"The 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?" And Jesus said to them, "Can the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast. But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days. 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. 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." Mark 2:18-22 NKJV

- A. Disciples (followers) of both the Pharisees and John the Baptist were fasting and had a question about fasting.
1. Only one day for fasting was specified in the Torah (the Day of Atonement—here fasting was an act of repentance awaiting forgiveness)
 2. By the time of Jesus other fasting “traditions” had developed-Pharisees fasted on Monday and Thursday.
 3. Both of these groups fasted for different reasons (Pharisees for super-spirituality and John’s a sign of mourning and mourning the death of John is suggested by some but more likely fasting in repentance trying to hasten the coming of the Lord)
 4. They demanded to know why the disciples of Jesus did not fast
- B. The response of Jesus—counters a question with a question
1. Can the celebrants at the wedding mourn while their they are celebrating?
 2. To fast in the middle of a celebration time and bring down with ones mourning the celebrating party would be unthinkable
 3. Jesus has not yet explained the spiritual significance of him as bridegroom and them as bride BUT in a veiled manner he makes the same point—he is with them, they are enjoying his presence—why would they fast?
 4. Jesus is their center and joy but a time would come when He would leave—fasting would be appropriate then. (In other words when he does leave—sorrow would be appropriate).

C. Two parables of Jesus

1. This was a different day and if the disciples of Jesus followed the practice of the Pharisees in fasting it would be as if they were to put new wine in an old wine skin or new cloth on an old piece of cloth.
2. Their joy (not mourning) reflects that which is new (that which is completely different than the old).

- a. Pharisees practice of fasting perpetuated the old form in a mechanical manner which was void of belief or faith—just do to because it is tradition
- b. The joy of the disciples reflects a period of joy out of relationship and intimacy now possible to those who believe and an assurance that one day there would be even greater intimacy.

Truth #1

I. It is the manifest presence of Jesus that gives us incomparable joy now and inexpressible hope for the future.

- This walk with Christ is not a life of religious routine that we dutifully perform.
- This walk with Christ is not a life of measured performance that seeks to earn the favor and reward of God.
- This walk with Christ IS a life of growing intimacy with Him and a hope for the future that transcends our fondest imagination. (Not old wine or old cloth—New and fulfilling joy and hope)
- Jesus came to give you life and that more abundantly (John 10:10) and of you are not experiencing that kind of life you are not enjoying the life He came to bring.

“Whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory”. I Peter 1:8 NKJV

(ILL) Unhappy Christians Hurt Witness

Dennis Prager, talk show host, author, columnist, Happiness Is a Serious Problem (Regan Books, 1998), p.4; submitted by Rich Tatum, Wheaton, Illinois

I once asked a deeply religious man if he considered himself a truly pious person. He responded that while he aspired to be one, he felt that he fell short in two areas. One of those areas, he said, was his not being a happy enough person to be considered truly pious.

His point was that unhappy religious people reflect poorly on their religion and on their Creator. He was right; in fact, unhappy religious people pose a real challenge to faith. If their faith is so impressive, why aren't these devoted adherents happy? There are only two possible reasons: either they are not practicing their faith correctly, or they are practicing their faith correctly and the religion itself is not conducive to happiness. Most outsiders assume the latter reason. Unhappy religious people should therefore think about how important being happy is—if not for themselves, then for the sake of their religion.

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Unhappy, let alone angry, religious people provide more persuasive arguments for atheism and secularism than do all the arguments of atheists.

- Christians that are mad, angry, hopeless all the time
- Christians that have to have a glass of wine to unwind and relax
- What are you telling the world?
- Do you have intimacy with Christ right now—do you know Him?
- He saved you, kept you from Hell, gave you His Spirit
- So much to be thankful for

To the **Fourth Narrative (2:23-28)**

*“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. And the Pharisees said to Him, “Look, why do they do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?” But He said to them, “Have you never read what David did when he was in need and hungry, he and those with him: 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?” And He said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath.”*Mark 2:23-28 NKJV

A. The fourth controversy of Mark is prompted by the disciples plucking grain from the field on the Sabbath.

1. It was legitimate to pluck grain (see Deuteronomy 23:25)

“When you come into your neighbor’s standing grain, you may pluck the heads with your hand, but you shall not use a sickle on your neighbor’s standing grain.” Deuteronomy 23:25 NKJV

2. The issue was it was on the Sabbath (and interpreted as reaping by the Pharisees) and this was forbidden (see Exodus 34:21)

“Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; in plowing time and in harvest you shall rest.” Exodus 34:21 NKJV

Mishnah (Hebrew Commentary on OT)—39 categories of work forbidden on Sabbath and the 3rd one was reaping

- The Scribes taught that a teacher was responsible for the behavior of His disciples
- So they bring their criticism to Jesus

B. Jesus answers their criticism by appealing to the Old Testament

“David went to the town of Nob to see Abimelech the priest. Abimelech trembled when he saw him. “Why are you alone?” he asked. “Why is no one with you?” “The king has sent me on a private matter,” David said. “He told me not to tell anyone why I am here. I have told my men where to meet me later. Now, what is there to eat? Give me five loaves of bread or anything else you have.” “We don’t have any regular bread,” the priest replied. “But there is the holy bread, which you can have if your young men have not slept with any women recently.” “Don’t worry,” David replied. “I never allow my men to be with women when we are on a campaign. And since they stay clean even on ordinary trips, how much more on this one!” Since there was no other food available, the priest gave him the holy bread—the Bread of the Presence that was placed before the Lord in the Tabernacle. It had just been replaced that day with fresh bread.” 1 Samuel 21:1-6 NLT

1. What is the point here?
2. David and his men did something that was forbidden (it seemed) when they were hungry
3. The same thing the disciples did—David was not condemned by God in doing this

C. Jesus gives clarity to the purpose of the Law

“And He said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath.” Mark 2:27-28 NKJV

- Jesus does not ask “what are the rules and what do people think I should do?” first
- He asks “who needs to be helped?”
- The Law was given for the benefit of humankind not to tie humankind up in knots

Second Truth:

II. It is mercy for others that satisfies the heart of God not being sticklers to religious rules.

David Garland writes, “The Pharisees’ approach treats ritual and institution as key. If the law contains any ambiguities, it must be made specific so that one may know precisely what must be done at all times and who is guilty of an infraction. Such an approach easily veers into a kind of slavery—religion for religions’ sake. And the pietist become like an ill-taught piano student who plays all the right notes but fails to make music, like an actor in a B movie who woodenly recites a memorized script but who does not carry any conviction, or like a dancer who carefully counts the steps but never cuts loose to dance. A fondness for negatives and long checklist of rules, particularly for other people, can make religious life a burdensome ordeal that never sings or exalts, and religious duties an obstacle course that weeds out weakling sinners.”

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Ravi Zacharias in "Jesus among Secular Gods"

We were sitting in a coffee shop in Jerusalem and he spoke in soft tones. He mentioned to me that he had observed a conversation between a leading Muslim sheikh and a Christian missionary named Brother Andrew. The sheikh had recently ordered the killing of eight Israelis because the Israelis had killed four Palestinians whom they had accused of crimes against the Jewish people. Brother Andrew asked the sheikh, "Who appointed you judge and jury and gave you the authority to order such killings?" The sheikh replied, "I am not the judge and jury. I am merely an instrument of God's justice." There was a moment of silence and then Brother Andrew asked, "What place is there, then, for forgiveness?" The sheikh replied, "Forgiveness is only for those who deserve it."

Now there was a real protracted silence. The young Palestinian said to me, "I thought at once, this explains everything and nothing. If forgiveness is merited, then it's not really forgiveness, is it? But I remained silent," he said, "because I saw two completely different worldviews at work, both with a common starting point about God, but with radically different views of God." Grace is real and needed.

Elyse Fitzpatrick writes :

The primary reason the majority of kids from Christian homes stray from the faith is that they never really heard it or had it to begin with Scratch the surface of the faith of the young people around you and you'll find a disturbing deficiency of understanding of even the most basic tenets of Christianity.

This is illustrated by a conversation I recently had with a young woman in her early twenties who had been raised in a Christian home and had attended church for most of her life. After assuring me that she was, indeed, saved, I asked her, "What does it mean to be a Christian?"

She replied, "It means that you ask Jesus into your heart."

"Yes, all right, but what does that mean?"

"It means that you ask Jesus to forgive you."

"Okay, but what do you ask him to forgive you for?"

"Bad things? I guess you ask him to forgive you for bad things, the sins you do."

"Like what?"

A deer in the headlights stared back at me. I thought I'd try a different tack.

"Why would Jesus forgive you?"

She fidgeted. "Um, because you ask him?"

[I asked], "What do you think God wants you to know?"

She beamed. "He wants me to know that I should love myself and that there's nothing I can't do if I think I can."

"And what does God want from you?" I asked.

"He wants me to do good stuff You know, be nice to others and don't hang around with bad people."

[Apparently], we've transformed the holy, terrifying, magnificent, and loving God of the Bible into Santa and his elves. And instead of transmitting the gloriously liberating and life-changing truths of the gospel, we have taught our children that what God wants from them is morality. We have told them that being good (at least outwardly) is the be-all and end-all of their faith. This isn't the gospel; we're not handing down Christianity.

—We must have them encounter Jesus

—Fall in love with Him—then you will live a life pleasing to Him

Final Narrative of this Section

“And He entered the synagogue again, and a man was there who had a withered hand. So they watched Him closely, whether He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him. And He said to the man who had the withered hand, “Step forward.” Then 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. 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 as whole as the other. Then the Pharisees went out and immediately plotted with the Herodians against Him, how they might destroy Him.” Mark 3:1-6 NKJV

A. The last of the five conflict narratives

1. Topically it takes its place by the other Sabbath incident
2. Interesting piece is that Jesus asks his critics what is lawful on the Sabbath and they are silent
3. No one dared question Him
4. This conclusive narrative leads the religious leaders to plan his death

B. The religious leaders were exasperated by Jesus and watched Him closely to see if he would heal—this had been an issue already

“Now He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And behold, there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bent over and could in no way raise herself up. But when Jesus saw her, He called her to Him and said to her, “Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity.” And He laid His hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God. But the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath; and he said to the crowd, “There are six days on which men ought to work; therefore come and be healed on them, and not on the Sabbath day.” Luke 13:10-14 NKJV

1. Here in Mark, His adversaries were expecting Him to heal again on the Sabbath
2. The scribes and Pharisees did believe that life could take precedent over the Sabbath but none of the healings of Jesus were considered life-threatening
3. They knew Jesus could heal but should not on the Sabbath
4. Jesus puts the issue in the hands of the leaders in the synagogue (man in their midst, step forward, can I do good or evil give life or death on Sabbath?)
5. Jesus looked at them with anger—their silence was not consent and He knew that—it was their hard hearts
6. Told him to stretch out his hand and he did and was healed

C. From this point on they conspired to put him to death and how they might kill him

Third and Final Truth

III. It is the rejection of Christ's imposition into our lives, plans, and religion that both angers and saddens the heart of God and leads to our judgement.

"And when He had looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts..." (v. 5)

- They wanted no one to mess with their little world
- They wanted no intrusion into their religious activity and what they called "worship"
- They did not want him to mess with their lives
- They plotted to kill the giver of life and the provide of redemption (the ultimate act leading to their judgment)

Ominous text:

"No, the wisdom we speak of is the mystery of God —his plan that was previously hidden, even though he made it for our ultimate glory before the world began. But the rulers of this world have not understood it; if they had, they would not have crucified our glorious Lord." 1 Corinthians 2:7-8 NLT

- How do you feel when God wants to change you? When He wants to impose on you, change your way of thinking, call out your sin?

Conclusion: This section comes to an end—5 conflicts in Galilee and now they plan to kill Jesus because He has:

- Blasphemed (forgiven sin)
- Mixed with sinners
- He has not encouraged his disciples to fast but to enjoy Him
- Eaten bread on the Sabbath
- Now healed on the Sabbath

All of this is a call and charge to conversion (to change)

1. Relational experience with Him not religion
2. Giving of mercy is what satisfied God, not rigid rule-keeping
3. Yielding to His imposition and intrusion in our lives so that He can have us and transform us

Are you open to this conversion experience?

Charles Sheldon— "Jesus is a great divider of life. One must walk parallel with Him or directly across His way."