

A Study of Mark's Gospel

Week Three

Mark 2:13-3:12

Day One

13 Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. 14 As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him. 15 While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. 16 When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the "sinners" and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?"

v. 13 – If you have ever been to Galilee, you would know how large the Sea of Galilee is and how it dominates the entire region. The lake seems to have been the focal point for much of Jesus' public ministry as well. I do a lot of work in Africa and people often refer to me as a missionary. I don't think of myself as one because I don't do medical work, or build buildings or work in an orphanage, which are all common missionary activities. Yet I suppose I am one because I engage in one activity that Jesus did as a missionary, and that is teach.

Do you ever think of Jesus as a missionary? Well, He was! He went to a foreign culture, immersed Himself in it, became one of the locals and then began to minister to their spiritual needs. He was the quintessential missionary!

v. 14 – Mark did not linger go into any details about the teaching by the lake, but moved on to Levi's call to be a disciple. Mark put great emphasis on Jesus' team building activities. As mentioned in a previous study, Jesus saw a team as critical to His ministry. **Of whose team are you a member? Who is on your team?**

Was this Jesus' first contact with Levi? It seems so super spiritual that on this first encounter Levi walked away from everything to follow Jesus. There is a chance, however, that Levi was familiar with Jesus and perhaps even had a previous discussion with Him. Having considered being a follower for some time, Levi was then given the invitation and he took advantage of it. **Are you taking advantage of all the invitations that God is issuing you to serve Him?** When I go to Africa, I am convinced that others have been asked to go and would not. I was asked and I went, by God's grace. I am glad I answered the call.

vs. 15&16 – The tax gatherers were a hated group of men in Israel, for they were Jews who collected taxes from their own people to fund Caesar's empire. Yet a large number of these men followed Jesus. The culture loathed these men but Jesus loved and welcomed them, calling them to repentance as He did to all. The religious establishment was indignant that Jesus associated and welcomed such unscrupulous fellows. What's

more, they grumbled against Jesus, trying to hold Jesus' disciples accountable for His actions.

Religious people seldom see how spiritually needy they are. They almost always see how needy other people are. Spiritual people tend to see how needy they are while loving the potential in others if only they can be rightly related to God. **Which tendency do you identify with? Do you have any "sinners" in your life who like to be around you? Do you have any that you enjoy being around? If not, why not?**

Day Two

17 On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." 18 Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. Some people came and asked Jesus, "How is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?" 19 Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them. 20 But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast.

v. 17 – Jesus never hesitated to confront His critics. If He knew someone was thinking or saying something against Him, He went to that person. When He did this, however, He used it as a teaching opportunity and not just to vindicate Himself. In this instance, Jesus educated those listening concerning His purpose, which was to heal the spiritually sick in Israel. If someone did not see themselves as sick, therefore, they had no need of Jesus.

I need Jesus because I am sick. I have this sin problem that is common to all mankind and I can't do anything about it. I must check myself into the Jesus' clinic to overcome my addiction to sin. **Will you join me in that "clinic"? Will you invite others to come? Only those who see their sickness can join us. Those who are well need not come.**

v. 18 – I wonder why the men were fasting? Was it a holy day, or just a regular spiritual discipline? Yesterday we saw the Pharisees question the disciples about Jesus practices and behavior. Today we have people questioning Jesus about the disciples' habits. I don't think the questioners wanted information in either case. I think they were simply disguising their criticism and disapproval while pretending to seek clarification.

I have urged you to be honest with God when you pray on many occasions in these studies. I further urge you to ask Him good questions as you seek Him. Don't let your questions hide a bad heart, however, or veil a complaint. If you have a complaint against God, voice it honestly. Don't cloak it under some pretense.

vs. 19&20 – Jesus refused to march to the beat of His critics' drums. He didn't gather the disciples and say, "Hey guys. I'm taking some heat because you aren't spiritual enough and fasting. Can we make some adjustments here so that I can get these people off my back." Instead Jesus told them that the excitement and newness of His relationship with

the disciples prevented them from doing things as usual. Jesus assured His critics that things would return to normal at some point but, for right now, His disciples would not be doing things the way the religious establishment was accustomed to having them done.

This seems to be the case with every new move of God. The previous move has a problem with the way things are done and the new move is anxious not to continue past traditions. After the initial excitement, things usually settle down and the new movement begins to adopt practices that they had previously avoided as “old fashioned.” It’s always important not to judge a new movement by old standards, but to allow the new to mature and develop. **Are you a critic of any new move of God?** Perhaps you need to chill out and give that new move time to sort things out, free from your criticism.

Day Three

21 "No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse. 22 And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, he pours new wine into new wineskins." 23 One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. 24 The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?"

v. 21 – Jesus was a great teacher, due both to His insight into Scripture and His teaching style. Jesus drew on many common examples to which the people of His day could easily relate. In this verse, Jesus continued to respond to the question as to why His disciples did not fast as the other men were doing. I think Jesus was trying to sensitize them to the fact that He was present to institute something new to Israel. It would be a mistake to evaluate it by old standards or to expect it to be incorporated into the old system.

There was a “hole” in Judaism, the old garment, and Jesus came not to patch the old but to create the new! Of course, the old guard missed what He was doing, for the most part, and opposed His work. They liked the holes in the old garment and only wished to patch them up as the need arose.

v. 22 – Jesus continued to make His point that something new was happening in Israel through Him, comparing it to pouring new wine into old wineskins. The acidity of the new wine would burst the old wineskins so new wine could only be put into new wineskins. At that point, some people went home and said, “I have no idea what the man was talking about” because Jesus spoke in parables to conceal His message from those who did not have a heart or mind to receive it.

There are many applications for this analogy, but let’s make it personal. What **are you doing to prepare yourself to grow so you are equipped for God to do a new thing in you?** Last year I took a training program that changed my life. Now I am doing new things based on what I learned. Perhaps I should say that God is using me in new ways

because I got a new wineskin. That made room for the new wine. It can't be the other way around; you can't start with new wine and then try to find a skin. **Does that make sense?**

vs. 23&24 – As if to reinforce this point, Mark moved right into a story of Jesus going through a grain field on the Sabbath. As He went, He reached out His hand to pull off some wheat kernels to eat. The legalists, however, objected, stating that Jesus had just “harvested” wheat on the Sabbath and was in violation of the Law.

Religious people are never interested in intent, only form. They don't want to know and don't care why someone does what they do. They only know the Law and recognize violations of it. Here was a clear violation in their mind, for these men had profaned the Sabbath by working to get the wheat kernels off the stalk. This is ludicrous, of course, but we must be careful to do the same thing. Impossible you say? Not really.

Any time you think you know what God wants and doesn't want and judge another according to that standard, you are operating in the same spirit as these legalists did. **Can God bless someone who has blue hair and tattoos? Are they welcome in the midst of your fellowship or your own heart?** If not, then you are saying that they have violated some code that prevents them from receiving God's grace. You are no different than the men who judged Jesus on that Sabbath day thousands of years ago.

Can you think of any other rules that you have or that you see the Church has that operate in the same spirit as these legalists?

Day Four

25 He answered, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? 26 In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions." 27 Then 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."

vs. 25&26 – Jesus answered His critics with an example from their own Scriptures. He took them to 1 Samuel 21 to see a story that wasn't about Sabbath-breaking. The example showed that the bread in the house of God was for men to eat, and not to display for God's benefit. It is of note that the legalists had read and probably even memorized this story, but they didn't really understand the lesson of the story. The same can be true for you and me. I can read but I may not understand God's intent as I read and understanding is the most important thing.

John addressed this problem in his gospel:

Nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent. You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are

the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life (John 5:38-40).

It is possible to know God's word but not know God. You can memorize God's word and not comprehend God's will. You can read God's words but not enter into God's intent behind the words. So it is critical that we study God's word to try and grasp the Spirit's meaning behind the words. The good news is that the One who inspired the Word as it was written is able to impart the meaning of the Word to those who have a heart to understand. **Do you have a heart to understand? I know you do or you wouldn't be reading these studies.**

v. 27 – The legalists felt that man had to “keep” the Sabbath rules for God's sake. If someone broke the rules, they had somehow offended God because God “needed” the Sabbath to be kept a certain way. The Sabbath was a day of rest, however, and God doesn't need rest. It is man who needs rest, so the Sabbath exists for man.

It's not that big of a deal to me, but I don't understand people today who keep a literal Sabbath and won't do anything on that day that resembles work. I think it's important that we all rest and take a break from our normal routine, for our own good and not for God's good. Part of a “Sabbath” rest should be reenergizing in the Lord and His purpose for sure. Hebrews states

There remains, then, a Sabbath — rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience (Hebrews 4:9-11).

I may be wrong, but I think those verses apply to resting from our works of trying to please and serve God. Jesus paid the price for me to do that and I can never achieve what He did in my own effort or strength. I can rest from my own efforts and work because He performed His work. **Do you agree or disagree? Does this make sense? Are you scheduling rest into your busy life? If not, why not? What do you do for refreshment? Those are the real questions that help us apply the Sabbath principle as God intended, in my opinion.**

v. 28 – Jesus declared Himself as Lord of the Sabbath. First, He forgave a man's sins. Then He proclaimed that He ruled over the Sabbath and made the rules that govern that day. So not only did Jesus show from the Bible that the men did not violate the Sabbath when they pulled off the grain, He declared the legalists incapable of keeping watch over the Sabbath because He, Jesus, was and is Lord of that day. Wow! He put them in their place as His subjects as opposed to Him being theirs.

Day Five

3:1 Another time he went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there.
2 Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to

see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. 3 Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, "Stand up in front of everyone." 4 Then Jesus asked them, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they remained silent.

v. 1 – Mark kept with this lesson on the Sabbath by taking us to another time when Jesus went into a synagogue on the Sabbath. There He came face to face with a man with a shriveled hand. I have a friend who has use of only one arm and it has been hard for him. There are many things he can't do and then doing everything else with only one arm has put pressure on his good arm, causing pain and discomfort. I would think that the man Jesus met had the same problem.

v. 2 – The legalists weren't interested in helping this man. Instead they watched Jesus to see if He was going to violate their precious Sabbath day. After all, they weren't interested in or focused on the needs of people. Somehow they felt they had to protect God's integrity by punishing Sabbath breakers. What hardness of heart! What callous disregard for this man's suffering and condition! No wonder the people loved Jesus and regarded Him as radically different from their other authorities. Jesus relieved burdens; the legalists added burdens to the already difficult human existence.

These legalists had nothing better to do than watch Jesus and scrutinize His behavior. They watched Him in the fields and in the synagogue. What did these men do for a living? Didn't they have anything better to do than study this rabbi? Obviously not! The legalists should have focused on God and not God's people. They probably thought they were doing so [focusing on God] by making sure everyone complied with the rules of the Sabbath, as they had developed them.

v. 3 – Jesus didn't take the man out back and heal him away from the scrutiny. He had the man stand up. I like and admire Jesus! He was courageous and refused to back away from a confrontation. The legalists were wrong but Jesus wanted them to see what He was doing. Why? So they could repent and turn to God. These men could never face God and say they didn't know or hadn't seen God's power.

v. 4 – Before Jesus healed the man, He asked them questions, again trying to get them to see the light. Jesus did not want them to persist in their wrong thinking, so He was willing to be criticized and misunderstood so that ultimately they could understand. So Jesus went back to the basics of the Sabbath. The Sabbath was never intended to be a day when no good or healing could be done. It was a day, however, when no evil could or should be done. So doing good on the Sabbath wasn't the equivalent doing evil from Jesus' perspective. The legalists, however, saw doing good on the Sabbath as doing evil. What a twisted perspective!

Is your thinking twisted concerning any issue like the one we've just studied? Are you sure? Why not ask God to show anything that may need to be adjusted in your thinking or interpretation of God's ways?

Day Six

5 He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored. 6 Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus. 7 Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the lake, and a large crowd from Galilee followed. 8 When they heard all he was doing, many people came to him from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, and the regions across the Jordan and around Tyre and Sidon.

v. 5 – Jesus was angry! Hallelujah! He did not walk around as He has been portrayed in the movies, with an angelic, dreamy look on his face. Jesus was a man, yet without sin. If there is one trend I have seen in pastoral counseling, it was how ambivalent people were about anger, which led them to suppress or deny their anger. This in turn caused that person all kinds of trouble. The bottom line is that it's all right to be angry! It's what you do with your anger that can become sinful. Let me explain.

If you are angry at someone's bad behavior and hit them, or example, your anger led you to sinful behavior. But if you use your anger as a motivation to do something positive, like talk to that person (in a constructive manner), or as a motivation for change in your own life, then your anger can actually be positive. In this case, Jesus' anger was used for good because He did not back down but healed the man, knowing full well that it was going to cause trouble. Jesus used His anger to motivate Himself to do the right thing.

Plus almost everyone has been hurt by someone else's anger, so we tend to avoid our own anger so that we don't hurt someone else.

It is often overlooked that anger is an emotion that God gave you. Use it properly and it will serve you well. **Use it improperly and it will hurt you and other people. Is this your view of anger? Do you need to change your thinking where anger is concerned? Do you deny or hide your own anger?**

v. 6 – Now we see the negative effects of anger, for the Jewish in their anger plotted Jesus' death. Can you imagine? They conspired to kill Jesus because He healed a man on the Sabbath. Jesus used His anger to confront their illogical concept of the Sabbath. The Jews used their anger eventually to kill an innocent man. I have said to many audiences that religious people are among the meanest in the world, and that includes Christians, Jews and Muslims. Usually these angry people are labeled "fundamentalists." Believe me, there is nothing fun about being a fundamentalist. It is a hard job to be God's watch dog, protecting His image and reputation from sinners.

I want to be strong in the fundamentals of the faith, but I don't want to be a fundamentalist. **How about you?**

vs. 7&8 – The crowds knew that Jesus had what they needed and followed Him wherever He went. The leaders only wanted to kill Him. **Isn't it interesting that the people, who were uneducated according to the leaders, had more spiritual insight than their leaders?** This is why it is dangerous to assign more spirituality to a leader just because

they are a leader, like somehow that indicates they are more spiritual than others. If I serve God as a leader in a church setting, it is not an indication of superior wisdom or spirituality. It is an indication of God's grace. I used to tell people when I was on church staff, "I am a member who happens to be employed by the church." Therefore I never accepted a reserved parking space or felt I was entitled to special treatment or honor.

When you visit Israel, you get an idea of how far people traveled to be with Jesus. They walked for days, to sit and listen for days, only to have to return home for days, just to be with Him. **What price are you willing to pay to be with Him? If you recognize your spiritual needs, you will pay a great price. If you don't see your need, you may not go across the street!** That is why the writer of Proverbs stated:

A poor man pleads for mercy, but a rich man answers harshly (Proverbs 18:23).

If you are spiritually needy, you know you need mercy. If not, then you can even plot the demise of a righteous man, just like the Jews did with Jesus.

Day Seven

9 Because of the crowd he told his disciples to have a small boat ready for him, to keep the people from crowding him. 10 For he had healed many, so that those with diseases were pushing forward to touch him. 11 Whenever the evil spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, "You are the Son of God." 12 But he gave them strict orders not to tell who he was.

vs. 9-12 – This is the second time that we have seen this scenario in Mark's gospel. The people were being healed and the demons were crying out. The more Jesus healed, the more people came who needed healing. The people tried to touch Jesus for they knew He had what they needed.

What I do, I do by God's grace. I need Him and I realize my need for Him more than ever. I think that has made me a more effective servant, for I am more in touch with other's needs and can be more patient and understanding.

When Jesus prepares you for ministry, He will work to create the same dynamic in your life that was in His:

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need (Hebrews 4:14-16).

Do you see your spiritual need? Are you approaching the throne of grace with boldness, as these people did in Mark 2, to get help? Is your weakness translating into empathy and compassion for others?

I am also impressed once more that Jesus was in no hurry to reveal who He was or to have evil spirits appear like they were righteous by revealing His identity. Was Jesus wise in doing this? Well, just consider what happened to Paul when he did not:

Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. This girl followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so troubled that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her. When the owners of the slave girl realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. They brought them before the magistrates and said, "These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice." The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten (Acts 16:16-22).

I am not saying Paul lacked wisdom. I am showing the wisdom that Jesus had in stifling the demons. This servant girl spoke truth, but it was from an untrue source. I want to not only judge the truth, but the source of the truth before I allow it entrance into my life. Most of all, I want to have the same wisdom that Jesus had, which is available to me through the Holy Spirit. Give me wisdom, Lord!