

Finer Grounds

Mark

Lesson 3: The Prophesied, the People, and the Pharisees (Mark 2:18-3:25)

In the following verses, we will get an in-depth look at Jesus' personal interactions with those around him. We will witness as he calls those hand-picked to walk alongside him during his ministry, we will see his threat to the leaders of the day grow as his popularity grows, and we will see how those leaders and his own biological family react to his ministry. As we walk with Jesus through these encounters, ask yourself, "Which group would I be in?"

Before You Begin:

Read Mark 1:1-2:17 to remind yourself of the context of these passages.

Read Chapter 2:18-22

Mark begins this passage with the word "now," which in the original language was a present tense adverb frequently used to grab people's attention (Soanes 2004). This fits with Mark's storytelling style, and his Gospel account being intended to be read orally. He is describing the situation in a way that would give the listeners the feeling of "being there," driving home the fact that everything he is saying is historically accurate, and there were witnesses there who saw it.

In this passage, it is also interesting to note that verse 18 simply says that "people" came and questioned Jesus about fasting. Because, in context, the Pharisees have just publicly confronted Jesus it is easy to assume that this is an identical situation. However, since the Pharisees are specifically mentioned in a third-person format in the question, it is likely that this is a sincere question being asked by some of Jesus' followers.

While fasting was only required on the Day of Atonement under the law of Moses, at this point

in time, fasts were very commonplace. In fact, some Jews would fast every Monday and Thursday from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. (Lenski 1961). Although fasting is not specifically required, it is commonly seen in both the Old and New Testaments, particularly in times of great peril or when ardently seeking God's will or counsel (2 Sam. 12:16, Esther 4:16, Acts 13:2-3, Acts 14:23).

What is particularly interesting in this passage is Jesus' response. As usual, he is taking the opportunity to convey a deeper message than the people understand. Under the Law of Moses, fasting was only required on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:29-34). What Jesus is really saying is that there's no need for fasting yet, because true atonement will not be made until the bridegroom is gone (crucified).

Although fasting is the specific issue being addressed, this passage accounts Jesus' first public teaching that there was something completely different and new coming and that the Old and New laws couldn't be combined. Jesus' followers were confused because Jesus and his apostles were not holding to the traditions they were used to. Jesus responded by contrasting the old and new, and teaching that trying to combine the two would result in the destruction of both.

Think About It:

What are other New Testament books that detail the differences in the Old and New law?

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This is very early in Jesus' ministry, yet he is already trying to prepare his disciples for the coming of the new covenant. Why was this idea so hard for them to grasp? (See Galatians 1:14)

As Christians, do we at times steep our children and our grandchildren in "the traditions of our fathers" rather than in God's word? What will this result in?

Take Action:

Make a game-plan for ensuring that God's word rather than tradition is the authority in the lives of you and your family. Some ideas would be nightly family Bible studies, making sure to turn to God's word (in context!) when answering our children's questions rather than just telling them what to believe, and requiring our children, even at a fairly young age, to provide Scriptural references when they state something that they believe.

Read Mark 2:23-3:6

Once again the Pharisees are criticizing Jesus' failure to adhere to Jewish tradition, although his actions were perfectly within what was allowed by the Law of Moses (Deut. 23:24-25, Lev. 23:22). Seeing as "they" in verse 2 is not differentiated, it is likely that Jesus and the Pharisees were all heading to the synagogue at the same time to observe the Sabbath. Therefore, the Pharisees that criticized him in 2:24 are likely the same ones in Mark 3:2-6. These men were already highly suspicious of Jesus, and then twice on the same day Jesus publicly defied them and showed their

hypocrisy. This was the last straw for the Pharisees, who were not used to being challenged and resulted in their determination to destroy Jesus.

This passage really demonstrates the difference between Jesus and the religious leaders of the day. Jesus' actions are governed by love and compassion, both for God Almighty and for his fellow man, while the Pharisees beliefs and behaviors were governed by righteous indignation. To the Pharisees, religion was ritual, but to Jesus it was service (Lenski 1961).

Think About It:

Who do we most closely resemble? If we are honest, do we find ourselves honoring the letter of the law while neglecting the spirit of the law? Is the Sunday morning worship assembly a ritualistic culmination of our "religion," or is it where we go to worship God Almighty and receive a spiritual recharge after a week of daily service for the cause of Christ?

What does this passage tell us about Jesus the man?

What was it about this situation that made Jesus angry and grieved?

How was this man healed? What does this proclaim about Jesus' power?

Take action:

For at least one month intentionally prepare your family for worship. Talk about it the night before and pray about making your

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heart ready. On Sunday morning get up early so that everyone can take their time, turn on some songs of praise and spend time in the study of God's word reflecting on the condition of your heart. Pray about any issues that are hindering your heart so that when you arrive at the building you are ready to exhort and encourage your brethren and worship your God.

Read Mark 3:7-12

With this passage, Mark's account provides an excellent contrast at this point in time between the religious leaders and the common people regarding Jesus the Christ. In Mark 3:6 we see the Pharisees setting out on a mission to destroy Christ, yet in Mark 3:7 we see Jesus once again retreating to the lakeshore and being followed by the masses. We also see him continually reinforcing the messianic secret with the unclean spirits.

Think About It:

What do verses 8 and 10 tell us about the crowds following Jesus?

Read Mark 3:13-19

Here we have the calling of the 12, Jesus' inner group of disciples whom he came to call his apostles. The word "apostle" literally means "one sent" (Zodhiates 2000). It is interesting that Jesus first uses the word apostle here after his confrontations with the Pharisees because the word "Pharisee" literally means "the separated one" (Zodhiates 2000). Once again we see a contrast between the old way and the new way. Under the Jewish law the religious leaders, the Pharisees, were set apart from the rest of the community. Yet under the law of Christ Jesus personally designated those he hand-picked to be

the leaders of the church to be sent out among the people to minister to their needs.

It is also interesting to note the differences that we see among Jesus' chosen apostles: Peter, Andrew, James, and John were fisherman, Matthew was a tax collector and therefore known as a cheat and a traitor, Simon was a zealot who would have been known as a political extremist, and then of course Judas who was a thief (John 12:4-6). There is power seen in Jesus' choice of his inner-circle. These were the men hand-selected by the Messiah to spread the Gospel and institute the church, yet notice how different they were. Under normal circumstances, it is doubtful that these men would have associated with each other at all, yet the bond they shared in Christ enabled them to do tremendous things.

Think About It:

What is the significance of there being 12 apostles?

What is the significance of Jesus giving his apostles authority to teach and cast out demons?

Do we allow the differences between us and our brethren to divide us, or to unite us?

What does Jesus' choice of apostles teach us about evangelism?

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Take action:

For the next two weeks make an effort to talk to someone about the Bible that you normally wouldn't. The biker with tattoos, for older Christians the teen that lives down the street, those at work who you know do the party scene. What did you learn about them? What did you learn about yourself?

Read Mark 3:20-25

Here Mark employs an interesting literary style known as a chiasm. If we were to back up to verses 13-19 we would see:

- Verses 13-19 - believers (apostles)
- Verses 21 - opponents (his family)
- Verses 22-30 - opponents (Scribes)
- Verses 31-33 - opponents (his family)
- Verses 34-35 - believers (apostles)

Here we see two different oppositional groups sandwiched between references to Jesus' followers. Typically with a chiasm the material in the middle is what the author is attempting to draw our attention towards. So in this case, through Mark the Holy Spirit is pointing out that while there were some who believed in Jesus, his own family did not, and not only that, but the religious leaders of the day went so far as to attribute Jesus' miracles to works of the devil! It would be terrible to be rejected by your own family, but how much worse would it be to have all your good works attributed to the power of Satan! The precise wording of verse 22 implies that these Scribes were not merely taking a road

trip, they had come down for the particular purpose of seeing and confronting Jesus (France 2002). No doubt through the Pharisees word of Jesus' miracles and "rule-breaking" had traveled, and certainly along with it the incredible number of followers that He already had, and they were on a mission to stop it.

Within the religious world today there is a lot of discussion regarding this "unforgivable sin," however in the context it is clear that the sin Jesus is talking about is the Scribes attributing the miracles he is doing by the power of the Holy Spirit to Satan. Jesus combats these accusations with good old common sense, asking the Scribes how it would make sense for Satan to be casting out Satan. The truth is that Jesus powers were loudly proclaiming exactly who and what he was: the Son of the living God, the Messiah.

Think About it:

How does this passage relate to Matthew 10:34-39?

Have you ever had someone attribute negative intentions to your efforts to do good? How did it feel? Can you relate to Jesus here?

Have you ever attributed negative intentions to someone else's efforts? What are ways we can strive to avoid this?

This is the beginning of the end of Jesus' earthly ministry. He has chosen those who will carry on his message after his resurrection, and he has threatened the influence of the religious leaders to the point that they have decided to stop

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him. He has also cut his ties with his physical family to fully embrace his ministry. He has, without anger, malice or hatred, drawn his line in the sand and he will stand by it and see it through to the end. Have we drawn our line in the sand?

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