

3. Old and rigid vs. new and flexible

1/8/2006

In chapter 2 of the Book of Mark, we are going to see Jesus confronting the religious leaders of that time Pharisees and their hard and rigid “Dos and Don’ts” religion with His new and true way to heaven.

With amazing speed the news spread that a miracle-working Teacher had come to Capernaum. Wherever our Lord went, great crowds gathered. Jesus knew that most of them were shallow in their thinking and blind to their own needs.

Now the time had come for Jesus to demonstrate to the people what His ministry was all about. After all, He had come to do much more than relieve the afflictions of the sick and the demonized. Those miracles were wonderful, but there was something greater for the people to experience – they could enter into the kingdom of God! They needed to understand the spiritual lessons that lay behind the physical miracles He was performing.

In this section, our Lord makes it clear that He came to bring three wonderful gifts to all who would trust Him: Forgiveness from God, Fulfillment in God, and Freedom in God.

A. FORGIVENESS FROM GOD

Mark 2:1-4 And again He entered Capernaum after some days, and it was heard that He was in the house. 2 Immediately many gathered together, so that there was no longer room to receive them, not even near the door. And He preached the word to them. 3 Then they came to Him, bringing a paralytic who was carried by four men. 4 And when they could not come near Him because of the crowd, they uncovered the roof where He was. So when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying.

Let’s say we can see this scene through the eyes of our Lord Jesus:

1) When He looked up

He saw the four men on the roof with their sick friend. During the days of Jesus houses had flat roofs which were usually accessible by means of an outside stairway. It would not be difficult to remove the tiles, dried clay that comprised the roof and make an opening large enough to fit their friend through on his mat.

We have to admire several characteristics of these men, qualities that ought to mark us as “fishers of men.” For one thing, they were deeply concerned about their friend and wanted to see him helped. They had the faith to believe that Jesus could and would meet his need. They did not simply “Pray about it,” or “We’ll come back some other time.” They made all that commotion in the middle of His teaching to lower their friend through a hole in the roof.

By the time they completed in lowering their friend, all Jesus could see was their faces around the hole, anticipating a great miracle from this Miracle Worker Jesus.

Mark 2:5 When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven you.”

2) When our Lord looked down

He saw the paralyzed man lying on his mat. Immediately Jesus went to the heart of the man's problem – sin. Not all sickness is caused by sin, but evidently this man's condition was the result of his disobedience to God. Even before He healed the man's body, Jesus spoke peace to the man's heart and announced that his sins were forgiven!

Forgiveness is the greatest miracle that Jesus ever performs. It meets the greatest need. It costs the greatest price. And it brings the greatest blessing and the most lasting results to mankind.

Mark 2:6-7 And some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, 7 "Why does this Man speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

3) When our Lord looked around

He saw the critics who had come to spy on Him. These religious leaders certainly had every right to investigate the ministry of this new teacher, since the religious life of the nation was under their supervision. But they should have come with open minds and hearts, seeking truth, instead of with critical minds for their own selfish interest and seeking heresy. This was the beginning of their official position that ultimately led to our Lord's arrest and death. Jesus was now so popular that the Jewish leaders dared not ignore Him. In fact, they must have arrived early for the meeting, because they were right at the scene of action.

Mark 2:8-10 But immediately, when Jesus perceived in His spirit that they reasoned thus within themselves, He said to them, "Why do you reason about these things in your hearts? 9 Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise, take up your bed and walk'? 10 But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins"-- He said to the paralytic,

4) When our Lord looked within

He saw the critical spirit in their hearts and knew that they were accusing Him of blasphemy. They correctly believe that only God can forgive sins, and they are even correct for examining this new teacher. Their error is in refusing to see who Jesus is: God the Son, God Himself who has the authority to forgive sins.

This is the first time in the Gospel of Mark where Jesus took upon Himself the title "The Son of Man" which is a messianic title Jesus loved to use for Himself.

Daniel 7:13 I was watching in the night visions, And behold, One like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him.

Other messianic titles emphasize the fact that Messiah would be God, but this title emphasized that He would also be a man.

Mark 2:11-12 I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house." 12 Immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went out in the presence of them all, so that all were amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw anything like this!"

It was "harder" to heal the man than to forgive his sins, because forgiveness is invisible – no one could verify at that moment the man was forgiven before God. Yet it could be instantly verified whether or not the man could walk. Jesus is willing to put Himself to the test.

For men, both real forgiveness and the power to heal are impossible but for God, both are easy. It is a logical assumption that if Jesus has the power to heal the man's disease, He also has the authority to forgive his sins.

Suppose the religious leaders had opened their hearts to the truth that day, what could they have learned? They could have learned that Jesus Christ of Nazareth is indeed the Savior with authority to forgive sins – and their own sins could have been forgiven. What an opportunity they missed when they came to the meeting with a critical spirit instead of with a repentant heart!

When we were visiting Israel last November, we saw so many Orthodox Jews standing in front of the Wailing Wall and praying. My heart went out for them. They have a religion that talks about the Messiah, not the relationship with Him.

B. FULFILLMENT IN GOD

Mark 2:13-17 Then He went out again by the sea; and all the multitude came to Him, and He taught them. 14 As He passed by, He saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, "Follow Me." So he arose and followed Him. 15 Now it happened, as He was dining in Levi's house, that many tax collectors and sinners also sat together with Jesus and His disciples; for there were many, and they followed Him. 16 And when the scribes and Pharisees saw Him eating with the tax collectors and sinners, they said to His disciples, "How is it that He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?" 17 When Jesus heard it, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

When Jesus called Levi, he did not argue or delay. He got up and followed Jesus, even though he knew that Rome would never give him back his job. He burned his bridges, received a new name – "Matthew, the gift of God".

He was excited to invite some of his fellow "sinner" friends to meet the Lord Jesus. These were Jewish people like himself who did not follow the Law or appear to have much interest in things religious. It was exactly the kind of people Jesus wanted to reach.

Like Matthew, when we truly come to follow Jesus, we have everything we need in our lives. After all, He is the Creator of the universe and Almighty God.

Of course, the Pharisees had to be there to criticize Jesus. Jesus did not consider these people "rejects," even though they had been excommunicated by the religious leaders. Matthew's friends were patients who knew they needed a physician, and Jesus was that Physician. He comes to us in our need. He makes a perfect diagnosis. He provides a final and complete cure. And He pays the bill! What a physician!

But there are three kinds of "patients" whom Jesus cannot heal of their sin sickness:

- 1) Those who do not know about Him
- 2) Those who know about Him but refuse to trust Him
- 3) Those who will not admit that they need Him. The scribes and Pharisees were in that third category, as are all self-righteous sinners today.

Unless we admit that we are sinners, deserving of God's judgment, we cannot be saved. Jesus saves only sinners.

C. FREEDOM IN GOD

1) Friends of the Bridegroom and fasting

Mark 2:18-20 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?" 19 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. 20 But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days.

Jesus had already made it clear that He came to convert the sinners, not to complement the self-righteous. Now He told them that he had come to bring gladness, not sadness. Thanks to the legalism imposed by the scribes and Pharisees, the Jewish religion had become a burdensome thing. The poor people were weighed down by rules and regulations that were impossible to obey.

The Jews knew that marriage was one of the pictures used in the Old Testament to help explain Israel's relationship to the Lord. When the nation turned to foreign gods, as they often did, they committed "spiritual adultery." They were unfaithful to their Husband God Almighty, and they had to be disciplined.

2) The new wineskins for the new wine

Mark 2:21-22 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."

A wineskin would expand under the pressure of fermentation, so if you put new, unfermented wine in an old, brittle wineskin, it was sure to burst.

Jesus' point was made clear by these examples. You can't fit His new life into the old forms. Jesus traded fasting for feasting, sackcloth and ashes for a robe of righteousness, a spirit of heaviness for a garment of praise, mourning for joy, law for grace.

Through the centuries, old rigid form of human religion could not contain the work of the Holy Spirit. Through the generations, God often looks for new wineskins because the old ones won't stretch any further. The religious establishment of any age is not necessarily pleasing to Jesus.

Jesus came to introduce something new, not to patch up something old. This is what salvation is all about. In doing this, Jesus doesn't destroy the old – the law, but He fulfills it.

Any rigid denominational rules and regulations outside of the Word of God is not of God. We need to be flexible and open to the Holy Spirit. Blessed are the flexible, for they shall not be broken.

3) The Lord of Sabbath

Mark 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. 24 And the Pharisees said to Him, "Look, why do they do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" 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."

There was nothing wrong with what Jesus' disciples did, because their gleaning was not considered stealing according to Deuteronomy 23:25. The issue was only the day on which they did it. The Rabbis made an elaborate list of "Do" and "Don't" items relevant to the Sabbath, and this violated one of the items on their list.

Jesus never violated God's command to observe the Sabbath, or approved of His disciples violating God's command to observe the Sabbath. But He often broke man's legalistic additions to that law, and He sometimes seems to have deliberately broken them.

The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. The Sabbath Day had become a crushing burden, a symbol of the grueling religious bondage that had captured the nation. In Israel, the whole country literally comes to a screeching halt during the Sabbath day from 6 PM Friday evening till 6 PM Saturday evening.

This is exactly what many people, steeped in tradition, simply cannot accept the fact that what God really wants is mercy before sacrifice and loving others is more important than religious rituals.

Jesus declares that He is the Lord of the Sabbath. If He, the very Lord of the Sabbath, was not offended by His disciple's actions, then these sideline critics should not have been either.

D. APPLICATIONS

1) **Forgiveness is the greatest miracle that Jesus ever performs. It meets the greatest need. It costs the greatest price. And it brings the greatest blessing and the most lasting results to mankind.**

2) **When we truly come to follow Jesus, we have everything we need in our lives. After all, He is the Creator of the universe and Almighty God.**

3) **Any rigid denominational rules and regulations outside of the Word of God is not of God. We need to be flexible and open to the Holy Spirit. Blessed are the flexible, for they shall not be broken.**

2 Co 3:17 Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.