

[change we can believe in]

:: mark 2 ::

We're in Mark chapter 2 this morning. Head on over, we'll read it then make a comment or two before going out into whatever the Lord has for us today.

Mark 2.1-28 -And again He entered Capernaum after some days, and it was heard that He was in the house. 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. Then they came to Him, bringing a paralytic who was carried by four men. 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.

When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven you." And some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, "Why does this Man speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

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? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise, take up your bed and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins"—He said to the paralytic, "I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house." 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!"

Then He went out again by the sea; and all the multitude came to Him, and He taught them. 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.

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. 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?"

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." 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."

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.”

We need to change the way we naturally think of God and our relationship to Him. Naturally we don't seek intimacy with God, but instead we will put up barriers between ourselves and Him. We drift to legalism. Look at all the religions of history. Jesus intends to change all of that.

It's very interesting how this passage is set up. It's a formula that is repeated for us 4 times. So, obviously, the Holy Spirit wants us to take notice of what's going on here.

4 times we see the set up of a story, Jesus saying or doing something, the Pharisees being outraged and then Jesus turning their understanding upside down.

And to me, it's important that we pay attention to what we believe about God and what we believe being a Christian is all about, because the Holy Spirit is warning us here not to slip into the kind of mindset that we see demonstrated by the Pharisees.

But we need to realize that people don't usually just wake up and decide “I'm going to be a loveless, self-absorbed Pharisee today.” Remember: Pharisees were Jews. They were God's people. They had the Scriptures and the heritage and the Temple and all those things. Yet, we get to the Gospels and this group of people, supposed experts in God's law, we're found to be completely the opposite of what the Lord wants for relationship with us. This chapter reveals God's intentions for us in this life, but it also serves as a warning for us to not allow ourselves to slip into legalism and self-absorption and religious pride. And those are things that we are not immune to. We are not immune to Pharisaical attitudes. In fact, we're always going to be in danger of *becoming* Pharisees unless we purpose to stay Spirit-led, Spirit-filled and centered on what Jesus is doing in and around us.

So let's see how this works in these 4 examples.

First we have the paralytic being brought to Jesus dramatically, as his friends lower him through the roof. The Scribes have a problem with Jesus saying that his sins were forgiven. Now, at first I wasn't really faulting the Scribes too much here, because, after all, this could be a serious doctrinal concern.

But the truth is, Scribes and Pharisees didn't really care about forgiveness, at least in practice. As we see them represented in God's word, we quickly discover that they believed that God's favor and God's blessing and God's covering of their sin rested on the deeds that they did. The laws and rituals that they made for themselves. The tithing of mint and cumin and all their weird Sabbath regulations. They're not depicted as thankful for the *forgiveness* of God. Instead God's favor was earned through their outward actions. Jesus will call them out on this belief regularly.

So, this to me is less about a doctrinal issue that they're really worried about and more about the fact that, in practice, they would believe that this man was paralyzed because he hadn't earned God's favor. They didn't really understand or accept God's forgiveness of sin.

Jesus puts that upside down when He extends free mercy and forgiveness to the man because of his *belief*. Then the Lord backed up what He was saying with this notable miracle.

So the first thing I want us to take away from this chapter is that Jesus Christ has the power to forgive sins. He said so Himself. What can happen in our own minds is one of two things. On the one hand we fail to understand that God forgives our sins. We sort of sink down and allow guilt and regret to weigh down our lives. We can keep ourselves from advancing in our faith and our intimacy with God because we've decided that we're too unworthy to move forward. But Jesus Christ looks at each of us and extends real forgiveness to us. He looks into my life and says, "Gene, I've dealt with what you've done on the cross. Now let's go live a life together." What we need to do is take hold of that forgiveness. Not stay on the mat of spiritual paralysis. Jesus says that He's forgiven us and made us new. So we need to rise up, shake off the bondage that sin tries to put on our lives and move forward in the power Christ has given.

But then on the other hand we sometimes do not extend this same forgiveness to others. We expect them to *prove* themselves in some way or another. We hold onto grudges or judgements because we want to make sure that this person is *worthy* of our forgiveness. Christ has forgiveness for everyone who is willing to accept it. We are to be a people who extend forgiveness as well, unconditionally.

Next up, we see the story of Jesus at dinner with some tax collectors.

The Pharisees, as usual, are just lurking around. Stirring up trouble. They see Jesus calls Levi (or Matthew) as a disciple, one of the twelve, and then goes to dinner at his house. As you would imagine, a bunch of people were around. Many that followed Jesus, some, no doubt, whom Matthew had invited so that they too could hear the Gospel message.

Sometime during dinner the Pharisees pull out a new complaint. They're offended that Jesus is teaching this group, eating with them, spending time with them. The Pharisaical mindset wants to separate away from people, rather than welcome them to hear the Gospel.

Of course, Jesus points out that this was no accident, but in fact it was on purpose that He met with this group who needed to come to repentance.

What this reminded me of is that Jesus has a people for us to reach out to. All around us there are people. Some we know, some we don't know. Just here in this little town there are more than 50,000 people. And each one of those people is someone who God cares very deeply about. Someone Christ died for. Someone who the Lord wants to extend forgiveness and hope to. And we have to understand that God has specifically placed us here in this time, in this location, so that we will come into contact with people with whom we can share the Gospel! And if we're always drawing away from strangers or unbelievers or those who are different than us, then we're stepping closer to the Pharisee camp than we are to the Jesus camp.

We can't spend all our time with Christians and ignore the rest of the world around us. That's not what Jesus did. We have to be diligent to personally share with the people that the Holy Spirit puts in our path for ministry. That doesn't mean we have to stop everyone we see and evangelize them. That's not what Jesus did. But Jesus also didn't arrange His life so that He only had to interact with 12 Christian friends and no one else. There is a people that God wants us to reach out to, people who must repent and receive salvation before they enter into a Christless eternity.

Next up, we see Jesus share the Parable of the Cloth and Wineskins.

Pharisees liked to do these seemingly pious things out in the open for everyone to see. So, they noticed that the disciples of Christ weren't fasting, at least not openly. Now, this is a great text to look at when we have questions about fasting. Jesus certainly indicated that fasting would be a practice for the post-ascension Church, which includes us today.

But more than that this morning, these verses point out that God has a presence for us to enjoy, right now. He intends for us to actually *enjoy* our Christianity. But all the time we're assaulted from within and without to not draw nearer to God, to see our faith as an obligation and a burden. We have so many pressures between the Devil and the flesh and the world to view salvation and faith in Christ as work and as, you know, this terrible sacrifice. "Yeah, heaven's worth it, but what a drag the rest of this stuff is!" Legalism takes this attitude and then capitalizes off of it. "Well, no one *wants* to fast, but I'll do it in the open so everyone can applaud me and tell me how holy I am."

But, again, Jesus turns this attitude on its head. Instead, He says, "What I want for you is the kind of joy and friendship that groomsmen have before a wedding." It's been a while, but I can remember being a groomsman in a number of my friends' weddings. And those hours before the wedding are phenomenal. They're special. There's something wonderful about being in a relationship like that. There's a closeness and a celebration and an excitement that you don't get to experience every day.

But Jesus comes to us and says, "Yeah, that's what I want for our relationship *EVERY DAY!*" Now, obviously, our situation is different than that of Peter, James and John as far as the physical presence of Christ. But the intent that God has for us is a daily presence to enjoy. And I can say quite confidently that Pharisees did *not* enjoy their relationship with God. Because they didn't have one. They had a religion. They enjoyed the accolades that people gave them for acting so reverent and important. But inside there was only emptiness and obligation.

If we take an honest look at our heart before the Lord and find that we don't enjoy anything about our Christianity, then there's something wrong. We're not understanding what this is supposed to be about. Because Jesus is revealing the opposite of what we sometimes chalk our faith up to being. If our Christianity feels like a boring obligation, then we're probably viewing it in a legalistic way rather than the joyful relationship that God intends.

Then, finally, we see Jesus and His disciples eating some grain on the Sabbath.

This one is an interesting one. It's sometimes hard for me to relate to some of these incredibly Jewish issues. But we see the guys being hungry, eating some grain. Then the Pharisees

complain and Jesus relates the story of David and the show bread to them. What the disciples did was *not* unlawful. Not at all. It was just not Pharisaical.

What stood out to me from these verses was that God has a provision for His people. We need to be more *willing* in how we live our lives. What I mean by that is that we can get stuck into a routine or a way of thinking or a spiritual tradition and really resist any idea that's outside of that. But sometimes situations or opportunities or needs arise that require more faith, more reliance on God. And *sometimes* God's provision is not just the usual, every-day way of thinking. Sometimes the Spirit is going to lead us to do something that requires faith, even if it may not line up with conventional or tradition wisdom. After all, we're to live by faith and not by sight. So, as we're living life, we need to be willing to step out in faith. Often times we ask for provision, ask for provision, ask for provision, and all along God's had provision for us, it just wasn't the plain, regular, cost-nothing provision we were looking for. And if we're only always living by tradition and convention, then we're going to overlook the opportunities and provision that we receive by the Holy Spirit. We're not to do anything unlawful, but we also should box God as if He only does a few traditional things and nothing else. We need to become men who walk by faith as we're called upon to do. That starts by being willing and by seeking God for *His* provision for daily living. And it also means not stomping on other Christians around us who *are* living by faith. If they're not doing something sinful, then allow God to work and see what happens. Don't be the guy that goes over and shakes his head and says how stupid someone is for stepping out in faith in their ministry or their personal life.

The potential for Pharisee attitudes is within all of us. We need to recognize it, resist it and receive what God really wants for us. The power of forgiveness, a people to reach out to, His presence to enjoy and provision for living.