

A SCANDALOUS SAVIOUR

Mark 2:13-3:6

Introduction:

There is an old hymn, written by Charles Wesley, that says:

*Gentle Jesus, meek and mild, look upon a little child;
Pity my simplicity, suffer me to come to Thee.*

*Lamb of God, I look to Thee; Thou shalt my Example be;
Thou art gentle, meek, and mild; Thou wast once a little child.*

There are several more verses to it, but you get the idea. It is a beautiful hymn, and speaks to us in our desire to know Jesus and his love. And it is true that Jesus gave us a great example of meekness and humility. He reaches out in love and compassion to those who earnestly and sincerely seek him.

But there is another side to Jesus that we sometimes miss. Jesus ruffled more than a few feathers during his time here on earth. He did things that riled up the religious establishment of his day. It seemed like he was in constant conflict with the religious leaders—the Pharisees and the scribes (teachers of the law).

They didn't like the things he did; they didn't like his teaching. In fact, they didn't like much of anything about Jesus. We have already seen how offended the scribes were over Jesus' actions in the vv. 5-12. When he said to the paralyzed man, "Your sins are forgiven," they accused him of blasphemy.

Now the Pharisees are watching him closely, looking for some opportunity to trip him up—to catch him in some fault.

This morning we are going to be looking briefly at a fairly large number of verses. We already read Mark 2:13-17, but we are going to look at a couple of other incidents as well. Mark 2:13-3:6 seem to form one complete section, dealing with a series of events in which Jesus acts in a way that seems scandalous to the scribes and Pharisees. (The title of my message was taken from Alan Carr, a Baptist pastor in North Carolina.)

A Scandal Over Associating with Sinners

Our text this morning begins with the calling of another disciple – Matthew (Levi). (*Parallel passages – Matt. 9, Luke 5*)

- Tax booth – a place where taxes or customs were collected
- Luke mentions that "he left all"
- V. 10 – Luke says that Levi made a great feast, apparently inviting his co-workers and acquaintances
- "reclining at the table..." – customary low table
- The Pharisees and scribes (Luke) were lurking about, as usual. They were always filled with suspicion and paranoia, fearful of anything or anyone they considered to be a threat to their position of power and authority.
- They spoke to disciples... and so we have the first question...

"Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

- Discuss the terms "publicans" and "sinners" – the lowliest of the dregs of society. This was the worst insult to be grouped in with "publicans and sinners."
- The question was asked of the disciples, but Jesus heard it and answered their question—because they are the ones who need what I have to offer. (*discuss*)
- Matthew adds a statement in the middle of this answer.

Jesus says, "Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' I believe that if Jesus said, Go and learn what this means, then it behooves us to have a look and learn what it means.

- Hosea 6:6 – book of prophecy regarding both Israel and Judah

The Pharisees concern was to do everything by the book, follow all the religious practices, make sure they did nothing which might be considered to defile them in any way, yet they had no compassion on those who needed it most.

The bottom line in what Jesus said is that he eats with tax collectors and sinners because they are the ones who need a saviour. The fact that his behaviour seemed scandalous to the Pharisees did not matter to him.

A Scandal Over Neglecting Spiritual Practices

We need to keep moving. *Read Mark 2:18-22.*

“Why do John’s disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples don’t?”

- Fasting was an important part of the spiritual life to the Jews. God commanded fasting. So why weren’t they doing it?
- First, I would suggest that Jesus and his disciples probably did fast more than the people knew – Jesus’ teaching – Mt. 6:16-18.
- Analogy of the bridegroom – discuss the wedding custom of the day – this would be like the engagement party – when the groom leaves then his friends will fast. Right now we are celebrating. There is no reason to fast now.

The Pharisees thought Jesus was not keeping the rules regarding religious practice. In their eyes, it was scandalous the way he was living and he was leading his disciples away from the standards and expectations they had for how a good religious person should live.

At this point Jesus introduces a couple of illustrations to point out some important principles regarding spirituality. We will come back to them after we look at another scandal, this time over the Sabbath.

A Scandal Over Keeping the Sabbath

There are actually two incidents that we are going to look at here. *Read Mark 2:23-3:6*

First incident

- The disciples were plucking heads of grain as they walked through a field.
- What they were doing was perfectly legal according to the law of Moses – Deut. 23:24-25

“If you go into your neighbor’s vineyard, you may eat your fill of grapes, as many as you wish, but you shall not put any in your bag. If you go into your neighbor’s standing grain, you may pluck the ears with your hand, but you shall not put a sickle to your neighbor’s standing grain.” (De 23:24-25 ESV)

- The problem – they were doing it on the Sabbath. The Pharisees had built a whole body of rules and regulations to make sure they didn’t break the law about keeping the Sabbath holy
- So, when the Pharisees saw the disciples picking and eating grain on the Sabbath Day, they considered what they were doing to be work. Picking grain was considered reaping. Rubbing the heads of wheat was threshing. Rolling the wheat to remove the husks was sifting.
- The question – Why are your disciples doing what is forbidden on the Sabbath
- The response – Haven’t you read...? Jesus offers a precedent – David and his men eating the bread of the Presence
- The principle – vv. 27-28

The second incident

- A man with a withered hand in the synagogue
- Pharisees were watching to see what he would do (did they plant the man there as a trap?)
- Jesus confronts the self-righteous Pharisees regarding their callous attitude toward the sick and the maimed
- He healed the man

The result was that the Pharisees began to seek a way to get rid of him.

Lessons about True Spirituality

Well, we need to wrap this up. But first I want to go back to chapter 2, verses 21-22 – *read them again*. Jesus uses two illustrations to teach some lessons about true spirituality.

First illustration: new patch – old garment – discuss what happens, the patch shrinks and tears away from the old fabric.

Second illustration: new wine – old wineskins. These would be made from animal skins. Over time the skin gets stiff and brittle, and when the new wine is put in and begins to ferment and expand, the old skin will not have the elasticity that it needs and it will split open and both the wine and the wineskin will be ruined.

Explanation:

- A comparison of the old system of law, about which the Pharisees were very strict, and the new system of grace, which Jesus came to introduce.
- The new way, the way of love and grace did not match with the old ways of the Pharisees. He did not come to patch up their old way of life, but to offer a new life.
- The new wine, the message of grace and love cannot be contained in the old wineskins of Judaism and the law with its rigidity and inflexibility.

Conclusion

So, what does all of this mean for us? When I look at this passage, along with some others, I find it interesting that the Pharisees were always so troubled by Jesus approach to life. It seems that they felt Jesus was not nearly concerned enough about the rules, the laws, the obligations. Sometimes I think they were accusing Him of enjoying life far too much. Their religion was so rigid, so demanding and they thought He didn't take it nearly seriously enough.

Jesus came to bring life—abundant life, life that the Pharisees knew nothing about. Let's not be guilty of making our Christianity cold, rigid and inflexible the way the Pharisees lived their lives.