

Mark - Session 3**Scripture In This Lesson:** Mark 2:23 - 3:35**Goals:**

In this session we find Jesus continuing to expand our understanding of the nature of the Kingdom of God through his actions and words. He confronts the misconceptions of the religious leaders of the day and reframes what it means to follow the will of God in the world. Participants will be encouraged in this season to explore what Jesus is revealing of the priorities of the Kingdom, and discern how we can then apply those priorities to our own thoughts and actions.

Part 1 - A Person's Gotta Eat

Read Mark 2:23-28

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?"

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."

Mark 2:23-28 (NIV)

Questions To Consider:

1. What is your understanding of the idea of Sabbath? How do you make space to observe Sabbath rest, and what benefits to you experience as a result?
2. How would you describe the issue that the Pharisees had with what Jesus' disciples were doing? What do they seem to be most upset about?
3. What does Jesus mean when he says 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath'?
4. What does this passage communicate to us about what it means to have a Kingdom-based understanding of the Sabbath today?

Some Explanation:

Over time, the Law of God came to be separated from the heart of God that inspired the Law. As continues to be a challenge today, there's a profound temptation reduce what was meant to be a relationship between God and his creation to a detached and disconnected set of rules. It's a temptation that trips up even the most faithful and devout followers of God. Such was the case here. And Jesus is quick to correct it.

The religious of the day, in seeking to remain faithful, had focused on the Sabbath as a rigid command to do no work and then proceeded to outline the specifics of what 'work' was understood to be. In this case, the disciples rubbing the grain between their hands was defined as 'work.' As Doug reiterated in his devotion on this passage, however, the Sabbath 'was meant to be for our good, not to be another legalistic burden to bear.' And Jesus reminds us of this in his response.

In his statement that the Sabbath is made for people rather than the other way around, Jesus is affirming that the Sabbath was a call to a holy and healthy rhythm from a God who understands our fundamental need for work and rest and time for holy meditation on the heart of God.

Remember, the commandment was to 'Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.' (Exodus 20:8) It was a command to set apart a time for rest and worship that wasn't intruded upon by the demands of the rest of the week. Reducing the command to a simple, rigid requirement to do no work removes the aspect of holiness, worship, and taking time to enjoy the presence of God.

Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath, is taking time in this passage to remind us what the Sabbath has always been about; speaking from the authority of the one by whom it was instituted.

Part 2 - Put Your Hand In The Air... Like You Just Don't Care

Read Mark 3:1-6

1 Another time Jesus 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.

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.

Mark 3:1-6 (NIV)

Questions To Consider:

1. Why do you think the Pharisees are responding to Jesus the way they are? Has there been a time when you or someone you care about were resistant to the Good News?
2. The passage says the Jesus was both angry and deeply distressed at the Pharisees' stubborn hearts. Why do you think he responded this way? What does it say about his desire for the Pharisees in this interaction?
3. In Jesus question he asks if it is lawful on the Sabbath 'to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill.' Interestingly, with the Pharisee's focus on doing no work on the Sabbath, he doesn't given them the option of doing nothing. Why do you think that is, and what are the implications for the nature of the Kingdom of God in the world and what it means to follow after Jesus?

Some Explanation:

Jesus keeps pushing the boundaries of the religious leaders' understanding of the Sabbath. Notice that it doesn't say whether or not the man with the shriveled hand approached Jesus or not. The Scripture simply says that the man was there. Jesus noticed. The Pharisees noticed. And so they waited, watching to see if they could catch Jesus in doing work on the Sabbath; apparently not having learned from the incident in the previous passage.

Jesus, being who he is, takes the opportunity to create a teaching moment. He invites the man to stand up and asks a question of the Pharisees. What I love about this passage is it calls us out of the interpretation of Scripture that would see the Pharisees as the enemies of Christ. Here, Jesus is inviting them to be taught. He's asking a question and giving them an opportunity to answer and to learn. And I think that's why he's so upset when they remain silent. He's not just angry. He's distressed. He longs for them to engage the Truth that's standing in front of them and be saved from their hardened devotion to a limited understanding of religion.

Also of note is the lesson here that the Sabbath is once again reframed not as a day to simply do nothing, but to pursue holiness. In his question, Jesus gives the options of doing good or doing evil. Doing nothing is not an option. The Sabbath is a day for holiness and holiness is bound up in the goodness of our God. As such, it is entirely appropriate to heal on the Sabbath. And that's exactly what Jesus does.

Sadly, however, the Pharisees miss it. Rather than take the opportunity to learn and grow, they harden themselves in their positions and set themselves in opposition to Christ. Rather than hear the message of holiness and receive the Good News of God in Christ, they seek to silence the message that calls them to something more by killing the Jesus. It's a heartbreaking example of a stubborn refusal to repent that would lead to sin and death.

Part 3 - Things Are Ramping Up

Read Mark 3:7-12

7 Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the lake, and a large crowd from Galilee followed. 8 When they heard about all he was doing, many people came to him from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, and the regions across the Jordan and around Tyre and Sidon. 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 impure 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 others about him.

Mark 3:7-12 (NIV)

Questions To Consider:

1. Jesus has developed this rhythm of stepping out and then stepping back. Here we read that he 'withdrew with his disciples.' Why do you think he does this? Has there been a time when you took a tactical step back? What benefits did you experience?
2. Why are the people flocking to Jesus? What is their motivation?
3. Why do you think Jesus silences the impure spirits? Are they wrong? What is it about what they're saying or the way they're saying it that results in Jesus' rebuke?
4. What's the difference between the statement by the impure spirits and a genuine profession of faith?

Some Explanation:

Jesus had a keen awareness of when to step out and when to step back. He understood the balance needed between going out into the crowds and stepping back a bit to make space. This pattern continues in the theme of Sabbath in that sense. Jesus, following the public activities on the Sabbath heads back out to the lake. And the people follow.

Note that Jesus doesn't discourage the people from coming. He simply makes space to accommodate those that are there. This isn't a retreat, but a wise tactical maneuver to allow for more people to see and hear him. People have heard about the great things Jesus is doing, and they want to be near to him. They want to be healed. They want to hear this one who teaches with such authority. It does seem, however, that the interest of the crowds is still largely focused on the healing miracles of Jesus. To those approaching Jesus is known as a healer and teacher, though not yet understood to be the Messiah.

The impure spirits, however, know exactly who Jesus is and they shout it out in his presence. This statement isn't to be confused with an expression of faith. This is not an acceptance of Jesus as Lord or an expression of a desire to follow him. It is nothing more or less than a bare-minimum acknowledgment of who Jesus is, like saying his name. Jesus had come that the lost may be found, the sick may be healed, and sinners may be redeemed in a right relationship with him. What Jesus was looking for was a heartfelt confession that Jesus is Lord and Savior. To be a disciple is not merely to acknowledge that this is who Jesus is, but to then follow him as such.

Part 4 - The Dream Team?

Read Mark 3:13-19

13 Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. 14 He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach 15 and to have authority to drive out demons. 16 These are the twelve he appointed: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter), 17 James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means “sons of thunder”), 18 Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot 19 and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

Mark 3:13-19 (NIV)

Questions To Consider:

1. Do any of the names on the list stand out to you? Why? (Look at Doug’s explanation of the list in the notes on the next page for some further insight as to who these men were)
2. What does this passage tell us about the people God chooses and uses to further his Kingdom in the world? How does this make you feel about the way God might use you?
3. What does this passage tell us about how God is accomplishing his work in Christ? What are the implications for how we function as the Church today?

Some Explanation:

Copied from Doug's devotion for this passage:

'His newly appointed disciples included:

1. Simon Peter, a fisherman who would become the leader of the church, included among the inner circle.
2. James, a fisherman, nicknamed son of thunder which may mean he had a stormy personality, included among the inner circle.
3. John, a fisherman, brother and had the same nickname as James, described as the disciple Jesus loved, included among the inner circle.
4. Andrew, a fisherman, brother to Simon Peter, brought Simon to Jesus as recorded in Gospel of John.
5. Philip, a Greek name, who enthusiastically responded to Jesus and invited Nathanael.
6. Bartholomew, believed to be the same person as Nathanael, in whom Jesus said there was nothing false.
7. Matthew, also known as Levi, was a tax collector and may have been wealthy.
8. Thomas, his name means "twin" and the Greek form is Didymus. He doubted Jesus' resurrection until he could touch Jesus for himself.
9. James son of Alphaeus, may have been brother to Matthew and was sometimes called James the Lesser or Younger to distinguish from the other James.
10. Thaddaeus, was also known as Judas, son of James or Judas, not Judas Iscariot.
11. Simon the Zealot, zealot may have referred to a nationalistic political party of Judaism which then became a zealousness for Christ.
12. Judas Iscariot, Iscariot is an uncertain term which may come from Sicarii (dagger men) or being from the town of Keriath. He is infamously known for betraying his Lord.'

God's capacity to use someone for his glory isn't based on the greatness of that person, but on the greatness of our God. God chooses and empowers whomever he will. The great news of this for us is that there is no one that God can't use if we would hear his call, respond, and humbly allow the Holy Spirit of God to work in and through us.

Also of note is that Jesus is empowering these disciples to go into the world and do the work of the Kingdom. The Church in the world is not some passive organization where we simply celebrate the work of our Savior. In the invitation and empowering of Jesus we are sent out to join in the work; not simply to follow Jesus, but to follow his lead in the way we live, serve, love, give, and proclaim the Gospel that all may know and be saved. We as the Church have been entrusted by Christ with the single most important mission the world will ever know. How will that knowledge then shape the way we live?

Part 5 - Who Did What, Now?

Read Mark 3:20-34

20 Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. 21 When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind."

22 And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, "He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons."

23 So Jesus called them over to him and began to speak to them in parables: "How can Satan drive out Satan? 24 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25 If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. 26 And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come. 27 In fact, no one can enter a strong man's house without first tying him up. Then he can plunder the strong man's house. 28 Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter, 29 but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin."

30 He said this because they were saying, "He has an impure spirit."

31 Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. 32 A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you."

33 "Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked.

34 Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers!"

Mark 3:20-34 (NIV)

Questions To Consider:

1. Both the teachers of the law and Jesus' own family were having a hard time coming to grips with what was going on. Have you ever experienced a time when you had a hard time understanding what God was doing? How did you respond?
2. Let's address the elephant in the room. How do you understand Jesus' explanation of the unforgivable sin in this passage? What is the caution for readers of this passage?
3. How does Jesus redefine what it means to be part of his family? Who is his family and how do they make that relationship known?

Some Explanation:

A new thing was happening in the world. Jesus had come as a continuation of the work of God. The Kingdom of God had drawn near in a powerful way. It wasn't always an easy thing for people to wrap their heads around. Even the disciples who were closest to Jesus show us time and again in Scripture that they hadn't quite figured out the full significance of what was going on.

Understandably, then, Jesus' family was concerned. Put yourself in their shoes. They saw the crowds pressing in. They heard the whispers of plots against him. In this example he wasn't even being given a chance to eat. They were worried for this man they loved and they wanted to help as best as they understood how.

The teachers of the law lack understanding as well, but they go the opposite direction. Rather than respond out of care and concern for the well-being of Jesus, they harden their hearts against him and go on the offense. They accuse him of working on behalf of the Evil One rather than doing the work of God. It's at this point that Jesus cautions them against falling in to sin that would separate them from God forever.

As this question comes up often, it's important to note that the point here was not to clearly define the unforgivable sin, but to respond to the hardened hearts of the teachers of the law which put them at risk of missing the work of God that was happening right in front of them. That being said, to put minds at ease, the unforgivable sin isn't something that anyone is going to do on accident. Rather, as Jesus' explanation illustrates, it is a prolonged hardening of the heart against the work of God that sets one in direct opposition to God rather than simply being apart from God. It is calling the good work of God evil and holding that belief firmly at the core of one's very being. Such a heart is set against God of grace, and, as such will not receive the forgiveness offered in Jesus because they won't seek it.

Finally, what does it mean to be part of the family of Jesus? It is everyone who does the will of the Father. It is those who repent of their sin, call on the name of Jesus, receive the gift of salvation found only in him, and take up their place in the Kingdom of God as his adopted daughters and sons.

Please Close In Prayer