

Mark 2:13–3:6

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[0 : 00] Again, that's Mark 2.13-3.6. Please stand as you're able and remain standing with me for the reading of God's word. He went out again beside the sea, and all the crowd was coming to him and he was teaching them.

And as he passed by, he saw Levi, the son of Alphaeus, sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, Follow me. And he rose and followed him. And as he reclined at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him.

And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners? And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.

I came not to call the righteous, but sinners. Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. And people came and said to him, Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?

And Jesus said to them, Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day.

[1 : 28] No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the patch tears away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins.

If he does, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is destroyed, and so are the skins. But new wine is for fresh wineskins. One Sabbath he was going through the grain fields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain.

And the Pharisees were saying to him, Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath? And he said to them, Have you never read what David did when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him?

How he entered the house of God in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priest to eat. And he also gave to those who were with him.

And he said to them, The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath. Again, he entered the synagogue, and a man was there with a withered hand.

[2 : 44] And they watched Jesus to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. And he said to the man with the withered hand, Come here. And he said to them, Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?

But they were silent. And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, Stretch out your hand. He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.

The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated.

Well, good morning. Great to have you here as we continue now into our fourth sermon in a series in Mark's Gospel.

I want to ask you a question as you're settling in. Conflict. Is it a good thing or a bad thing?

[3 : 59] Controversy. Something we should be ready and willing to embrace, or is it something to be avoided at all costs?

Truth be told, conflict can be a good thing, just as controversies and escalating controversies can be an ugly thing, a destructive thing.

It all depends on how you view yourself in the midst of the conflict or the controversy. Today, we've got a text of these stories that each provide conflicts, really escalating controversies that for some are destructive.

In fact, they end up wanting to destroy the counterpart. While for others, and this is what I hope for us, the good news, that the rejection of Jesus actually leads to the redemption of our soul. that the conflicts he endured were not only the means by which we gain forgiveness, but they become the model that makes us ready to follow.

[5 : 36] I mean, you can see it more easily if I identify the five stories so that you can see the descending steps toward destruction.

You remember last week, chapter 2, verses 1 to 12, the question they asked, who are you to forgive sin?

See, the conflict started over a controversy. In a sense, very simply put, they questioned his authority. But let your eyes follow the four succeeding paragraphs, the ones that were read today. Because this questioning of his authority is then an unhappiness with his company. And the unhappiness these religious Pharisees have with his company give way to being troubled by what they perceive to be his lack of piety.

And that lack of piety actually now moves in an escalating way where they become enraged at his unwillingness to rein in his newly found family of rule breakers.

[6 : 59] and the unwillingness to rein people in on breaking rules finally leads to that last paragraph. They are incensed at his lawlessness.

There they are. Those are the five conflicts which produce cascading, escalating controversies that end for the Pharisees.

Ironically, in a very destructive way, you could almost take as the text, chapter 3, verse 6. It certainly is the conclusion of the unit.

The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him how to destroy him. I'm not too familiar with conflict because I avoid it at all costs.

Just joking. I don't like escalating conflict. I prefer to de-escalate tension.

[8 : 05] But the escalation of the controversies that were in the heart of the Pharisees actually have some good news for those of us who would be ready to follow Jesus.

There are those, they call themselves conflict theorists. I'm not sure if that's on your business card or not. But they actually speak about five steps, almost like these five stories.

Five steps that occur when conflict is escalating. First, the parties move from light tactics to something heavier, which is what happened in the first story.

second, the number of issues in contention in the relationship increase. It isn't just we got one thing anymore, we got at least two things.

Third, the relationship between the parties begins to deteriorate. Fourth, other groups of people are now brought into the conflict. And fifth, the goal of the parties changes from wanting to do well with one another or even to win but rather to hurt the other, to destroy them.

[9 : 19] that's exactly what happens in chapter 3 and verse 6. So let's take a look one by one on these descending steps, this basement-like stairway of controversy that for them led to destruction but for us a very good thing.

Take a look first. they were unhappy with his company. I'm taking that right out of verses 13 through 17.

Jesus is out now beside the sea. There's a man by the name of Levi, son of Alphaeus, sitting at a tax booth and Jesus calls him to follow him.

A tax collector in this region at that time would have been somebody in a sense that's taking in as they watch people come into a city and you're bringing in this many fish well I'm going to tax you that many shekels and they were normally Jews now hired by the Romans to tax their own people and there was great well you just might say opportunity for people like Levi to become wealthy.

Now Jesus goes to dinner with this man it looks like Levi was so thrilled that he reclined at table and look verse 16 many tax collectors and sinners are there with Jesus and the disciples and here you see again by way of a question the escalation of controversy why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners and when Jesus heard it he said to them those who are well have no need of a physician but those who are sick well I came out not to call the righteous but the sinners notice the problem is with Jesus not with Levi the problem is with Jesus they didn't like his company and yet

for Jesus their company was the very thing for which he came he embraced those who recognized that they had a spiritual need that only he could rightly mend as a physician of their soul so the controversy for them is I don't like your company the good news for you is he just might be willing to recline at table at your house see

[12:19] Jesus is good news for sinners I guess I was talking to you there Jesus is good news for sinners and without this paragraph I might actually begin to wonder is he willing to enter into my home is he willing to sit at my table he who knows all things who can uncover the heart of us all is he is he actually here to heal me is he interested in my salvation you see the conflict for them was an unhappiness with his company the good news for you is that he's willing to attend to our needs now that's good news no we opened up the series four weeks ago simply on that question anyone here in need of some good news

Mark claims to have some good news that's the good news of this conflict he's willing ready in fact he was sent with a desire to stay in your home well it's not the only one though that this unhappiness with his company gives way doesn't it it gives way in one sense to the trouble they had with his lack of piety just take a look verses 18 through 22 now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting and now people that is other parties are now coming up and here's another question why do John's disciples and the Pharisees disciples fast but your disciples do not fast see they're troubled by this lack of piety now you need to know that the Pharisees had formulated all kinds of days for fasting multiple days whereas the

Old Testament record in Deuteronomy only prescribes one day a year for fasting but their piety was such that they were fasting two three days a week and it wasn't simply to hit a certain weight target it was actually to gain some favor with the divine creator of the heavens and the earth external pietistic activities that would demonstrate to others I care about God and God cares about me now he of course blows this out of the water Jesus does first of all by relaying this analogy of a bridegroom I think hinting at his background with the Baptist preparation from Isaiah where God was the bridegroom coming for Israel his bride and now Jesus in a veiled way saying the bridegroom is here when it's time for the wedding and time for throwing the party nobody's going around fasting in fact they're figuring out how much more food they can get on their credit card for the celebration he's basically saying it would be crazy to be fasting at a time like this the party is just getting underway and then he gives two analogies which to me are wonderful little ways of teaching notice verse 21 no one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment if he does the patch tears away new from the old and the worst tear is made and then the second metaphor no one puts new wine into old wine skins if he does the wine will burst the skins the wine is destroyed and so are the skins but new wine is for fresh wine skins you see the garment was something that would cover you but you hang on to your threads too long they become threadbare

Lisa and I had raccoon coats back when we first got married they were given to us by an elderly couple in Massachusetts they didn't have any need for them anymore I'm sure they rode in these coats in open roadsters to the Harvard Yale games or whatever it might take them I donned my raccoon coat full length she donned hers I don't know how many tails were on it we actually thought we looked pretty good we held on to them and we'd wear them at Christmas parties and such until I couldn't get my arm in it anymore because it had dried out the garment the garment eventually was just falling apart and we looked at both of these purported treasures and threw them in the trash where they probably belonged 15 years before yes some of you need to clean out the closets of these old garments but at any rate this is the analogy Jesus is saying why are we going with fasting in this pietistic endeavor to please

God when the covering that I'm going to bring to your sin is going to last and be warm and right and then the other analogy just by way of support on the wine skins you know they were normally made out of goat skin they were treated they were sealed they were soft they were stitched but in time all that kind of stuff gets dried out so Jesus says you know the day has come for the old skins of the old covenant and the old ways of relating to God to be thrown away the keeping of these rituals these traditions these mad made ideas on piety it's all gone now it's all gone it's away I'm doing something new I'm I'm a new wine skin in which my people can be held now you see what was happening was simply this

[18:43] Christianity was replacing the way in which people related to God and that's what the Pharisees didn't like they didn't want a replacement religion they wanted to hang on to their raccoon coats of piety and drink from the cup that leaked and could never actually support life so for them

the conflict escalates but for you and for me this is good news you know I asked the question anyone needed some good news well this is good news for any of you who would think you know I'm starting to come back to church I'm going to take a look at it I've seen that new building on the corner looks like something's going on but it's not going to be your pietistic rituals that walk you into a relationship with God thank God he walked into a place that says it's not done by piety religion is exchanged here for relationship

Jesus is the one which for them of course only escalated the conflict didn't it this question of his authority this unhappiness with his company this in one sense this this being peeved at his lack of piety now they are enraged at his unwillingness to rein in these rule-breaking followers that's the very next story and you begin to see how all these stories are building in ways that are better and better and better for you or worse and worse or worse you want to hold on to what you thought would bring you to God it's the sabbath thing right there 23 through 27 they are enraged at his unwillingness to rein in rule breakers so now the disciples are going through the fields and they're plucking the heads of grain and they're doing it on the sabbath where you're not supposed to be working these guys had gotten so wrapped up in the rules that the sabbath day to keep it holy which meant a cessation from work meant that you couldn't actually take grain from the stalk and grind it or put it in your mouth because that was producing labor that's how wrongheaded they'd become they were further incensed wanting to hold on to the authority that they had handed down and so he gives a story of their own king their own favored king

David says what what is with you guys you're worried about what's happening here with my rule breaking family didn't David himself go into the lord's house grab hold of some bread that was particularly there for the priesthood we were made for the sabbath the sabbath wasn't made for us so this this whole inversion is in play and it's destructive for them because now they no longer have authority over God's people but it's good for you if like me you prefer to be a rule breaker I don't mean God's rules I mean man-made rules that are thrown on top of people like weights in order to be made good with

God what a wonderful thing what good news this one who was rejected actually becomes the means of our redemption and not only the means of our redemption but the model for those of us who are following we can keep bad company and still be good we can in one sense break rules man-made rules and still be fine he moves on the last one is there after being enraged by his unwillingness to reign in his unruly crowd they are incensed and here it is you can see it's just built to an escalating cascading controversy that ends in destruction he enters the synagogue there's a man with a withered hand notice how bad their heart is at this point they watched him to see whether he would heal him on the sabbath so they might accuse him

I'm hoping you will do something good for this person because it will demonstrate your lawlessness of doing work on the sabbath day and I can accuse you so he says come here and he asks them this rhetorical question is it lawful to do good or harm they were silent and notice what happens in verse five these who are standing against him he now looks around at them with anger he's grieved at the hardness of their heart and he says stretch out your hand and he stretched it out and his hand was restored think about being there on a day like that I find it incredible what he's teaching is simply this the love of neighbor is the highest form of keeping the law loving your neighbor the purest manifestation of being a law keeper for what are the commandments but to love the [25 : 15] Lord your God with all your heart soul strength and mind and your neighbor as yourself and Jesus is now demonstrating this in clear form and think of it it's at this that they break the Pharisees went out and immediately held council with the Herodians against him that's a wonderful little phrase well wonderful in the sense of it helps me track with Mark against him we've seen the arrival of the king we've seen the activity of the king we've seen the authority of the king and today we see those who are taking a stand against the king but what's bad news for them is good news for us because Jesus demonstrates a love of God through a love of neighbor let me close it down for those of us who need some good news these escalating controversies that pit the Pharisees against our

Lord reveal to us the good news of the gospel that he sits with sinners willingly that he gives you freedom from man-made rules theologically that he loves you enough to be with you and to heal you what he's really doing here is throwing away an entirely old way of living and saying I'm here for you good news their rejection here early in the gospel means this isn't going to be a gospel where you're waiting to see what happens the die is already cast it's a spoiler alert they're going to destroy

him but in doing so he's going to redeem us and in redeeming us he models something for us he makes us willing and ready and eager to follow him regardless of the resistance that we might face for being in his name our heavenly father these stories train us they disciple us we learn that cascading controversies can have two outcomes and I pray that the outcome of these stories for us would set us forth by being eager to come to Jesus to receive his death on our behalf as the means of our forgiveness for on the cross you do for us what he did for Levi you bring us to be at table with you in Jesus name amen who