

Mark 2:13-3:6 (PM)

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Preacher: Rev. Aaron Roberts

[0 : 01] Just again, we are looking at Mark 2, verse 13 to chapter 3, verse 6. So we have these four stories before us, four stories.

And I'm going to be sticking fairly closely to the text, so it might be a good idea to open up those Bibles or open up that app. It is very dense, so I want to give you the big picture first.

So here we go. Ready? Big picture. Here we go. Here we go. Big picture. You ready? Here we go. Okay, so you've got these two threads running through these stories. Okay, the first thread is the story of Jesus, like the life-giving welcome of Jesus, the kindness of Jesus, the grace of Jesus, which is better than you think, more generous than you can possibly imagine.

It's the one thread. The other thread that sort of weaves its way through these stories is, you probably have guessed this already, it's the hardness of people's hearts, the hardness of their hearts.

Harder, worse than you think. Kindness of Jesus, the hardness of hearts. Those are the two threads running through it. And I want to fill that out just a little bit more before we get into the details.

[1 : 21] So Christ's welcome and authority and hospitality has been ratcheting up over this last chapter. We see that in his choice of disciples.

Fishermen, not the religious elite. Him touching and healing lepers, which was such a no-no. Here he is having dinner, this party with these tax collectors who people just thought were the scum of the earth back in those days.

So this great, the great welcome of Jesus just on display in just these astonishing ways. And on a similar trajectory, just getting more and more impressive, but in the opposite direction was the attitude of the religious.

That's ratcheting up as well. Instead of wanting to be with Jesus, find out more about Jesus, were curious about Jesus, they were questioning his commitment. Well, you don't fast, you don't respect the Sabbath, you hang out with all the wrong people.

And this opposition peaks in the last verse we read, chapter 3, verse 6, when the Pharisees and the Herodians decide they want to kill Jesus. They want him dead. Now, I'm no, Lorna, I'm no expert on hospitality.

[2 : 28] I'm no expert, but planning to murder someone? That's at the lower end of hospitality. Right? Christ's welcome.

Christ's welcome. More amazing than we can imagine. That's brilliant news, isn't it? And the hearts of the religious, worse than we can imagine. Good things to remember.

So, what we're going to do now is we're going to go through these four stories and dig into some details. So, scene one, story one, Jesus and Levi. That's Mark 2, 13 to 17.

So, Jesus is walking past this tax collector and says, follow me. And he does. He follows him. And then they have a big party for Levi and all his tax collecting mates.

Now, for those of you who are new to the sort of the Christian thing, tax collectors were hated. They were these customs officials who collected the tax for the Romans.

[3 : 26] And because they had the backing of Rome behind them. They could sort of extort people. They could charge whatever they wanted. Tax collectors got rich off the oppression of their own people.

And Jesus reaches out to this most hated man. And he picks him out and says, follow me. And he does. Surprising. Wonderful. Now, it would be easy to preach this story and say, yes, folks.

We should be like Jesus. We should be welcoming like Jesus. It would be easy to preach. And of course you should be. We should easily mix with people who don't share our values, who don't share our faith.

We should love and accept them. Doesn't mean we have to, you know, approve of every decision they make. But we should love them like Jesus loved them. And just, you know, not be weird around them.

Right? It seems that Jesus was very comfortable with these people. Enjoyed them. Liked being around them. So do that. Be like Jesus. But that's not the point of the story.

[4 : 38] It could be a good, it's a good second point. But it's not the big point. This week I read about a black preaching professor. A true story.

He was giving feedback to his majority white preaching class at a seminary. And a student had just preached a practice sermon on Ezekiel. The story of Ezekiel. You might know the story.

The story of Ezekiel prophesying over the dry bones. And the student said something along the lines of, we must be like Ezekiel. We must be like Ezekiel. And the other students were all giving him great feedback.

And when it was time for the black professor to give him feedback, he said, you know, when I hear minorities preach this passage, they never identify with Ezekiel.

They always identify with the dry bones that God will raise up again. He went on and he said, you must be careful, young preacher, not to make yourself the hero of every Bible story you read.

[5 : 39] That's the case here for Mark 2. Should we be like Jesus? Of course we should. We should be welcoming. But that's not the point. In this story, we are the tax collector.

We are the people in great need of grace. We are the undeserving friends seated at the table. And if that sounds off to you, then perhaps you're best represented by one of the scribes in the story.

Okay, what happens next? Well, after getting criticized for hanging out with the wrong people, Jesus explains his actions. And he says to the Pharisees, those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick, I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.

It's a great summary, isn't it? Those of us who are not well, whose hearts are not well, and we know it, well, Jesus has great news for you.

He has the best news for you. Now, in Ezekiel 36, listen to what the Lord says. He says, I will give you a new heart and a new spirit I'll put within you.

[6 : 54] I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. It's a wonderful promise. This is what Jesus wants to do. Stone's impenetrable. It's worse than you think, but Jesus wants to do a miracle in you and change your heart.

Those of us who are not well, and we know it, Jesus has great news for us. He can change your life from the inside out. But those of us who are not well, but think we are okay, passage says you are spiritually in a dark place.

And I think that's a pretty good summary of that first scene. So, scene two. Story two. Mark two, 18 to 22.

So, this is interesting. John's disciples, John the Baptist's disciples, and the Pharisees were fasting. And they did that to feel more spiritually focused. They also believed that fasting would make God's kingdom come faster.

In the Old Testament, there's actually only one fast prescribed, I believe, and that's for the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur. It's a very serious day. But over the years, the Pharisees and the religious leaders added more fasts to the calendar.

[8 : 09] And I think at this point, I think folks were fasting Tuesdays and Thursdays every week. Fasting was about, you know, they were about mourning the sin of Israel.

So, that's a bit of background. So, we read here in scene two, some people come to Jesus and we're like, how come you guys aren't fasting? You're not taking this whole religious thing very seriously, are you? And Jesus responds with a couple of little mini, mini parables.

The first one is verse 19. Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. So, I've officiated a few weddings in my life.

I've officiated a few of your weddings, actually, come to think of it, as I look around the room. You're welcome. And I love doing weddings. I really like the reception as well.

It's always just so joyful. But imagine going to a reception after a wedding and the emcee stands up in front and says, there will be no food.

[9 : 10] There will be no dancing. There will be no talking. There will be no wine. There will be no amusing or touching speeches. There will be no wine. And the emcee carries on and says, I want

you to turn your seats away from each other and use the next few hours as a time of quiet introspection.

Consider the ways you've ruined your life. Think about all the ways you've sabotaged relationships through your selfishness.

That's the guts of Jesus' rhetorical question here. Do you fast at a wedding? Are you miserable at a wedding reception? No. But what's the whole wedding thing got to do with what's going on here, apart from a nice analogy?

Well, in the Old Testament, one of the pictures, one of the sort of the word pictures to describe the Messiah that was to come was the Messiah was called the bridegroom, which is a lovely, lovely picture, right?

Bridegroom, big party, fantastic, right? Essentially what Jesus is saying, he says, we're not fasting now. My team, we're not fasting because something amazing has happened. Something that we should celebrate.

[10:24] The bridegroom's here. In other words, the Messiah is here. And the scribes, though, they can't see it. They can't experience it. Their hearts are so hard. They're like stone.

And it's so sad. And what's so sad about this is they are so committed to these religious disciplines. They're trying to speed up the Messiah's coming.

And when he does, they miss him. In summary, you know, Jesus rebuffs their fasting question by saying, this is not a time for mourning right now.

And that's what you guys, the fasting thing's about for you guys. It's not time for that. It's time to celebrate because the Messiah has come. Right. So what happens next? It's very exciting. What happens next? Jesus, quick parables.

Like I said, quick parables, which essentially say, this is verses 21, 22. You don't put unshrunk cloth patches on old pants because when you wash it, it'll shrink and it'll tear.

[11:20] You don't put new wine and old wineskins because the new wine was still fermenting, expanding. It'll rip the old wineskin, right? Like, what's he trying to communicate? He's trying to say something new has happened, something amazing has happened.

And the thing that's happened is that Christ is among you. Get on board. It's time to celebrate, not fast. But these little mini parables here remind them that I know this is going to be hard for you.

And let me tell you why it's going to be so hard for you. Because you're all about just religious observances. Jesus, and this new thing, you can't just patch on the old ways onto this new thing.

There's a lot more to say about that, but a brief summary would be this. Well, actually, no. In the New Testament, it actually talks about this quite a bit. People who begin to follow Jesus and love Jesus, but they start to incorporate all these old practices like, oh, you can't eat pork, and you must do this, and you must do that.

Old food laws, which have no power to change our hearts. Jesus, it's not going to work like that. This is a brand new thing that's happening. Okay, that's scene two. Jesus, great welcome.

[12:29] Let's have a party. But there's hard hearts here. Hard hearts, they can't see just past the religious drills. So they miss the Messiah they are trying to usher in.

It's very sad. Okay, moving on. Scene three, verses 23 to 28. Again, a question. Again, an accusation directed towards Jesus and his followers.

This time, it's about the Sabbath. So they're on their way. They're going somewhere, and they start plucking these heads of grain to snack on, and the Pharisees are up in arms. They are agog, aghast, right?

This is forbidden on the Sabbath, because picking grain, it's like harvesting. It's a no-no on the Sabbath. And it's clear the Pharisees think they have the spiritual high ground in this confrontation. So a little bit of background into the Sabbath. So taking a day off, taking a Sabbath in the Old Testament, very, very big deal. Perhaps the most central of religious observances, right?

[13:28] In terms of demonstrating your loyalty to God, the Sabbath was a really big deal. One of the Ten Commandments. God took a Sabbath himself after creation. So it's not a trivial matter. The Jews took Sabbath very seriously.

Everyone got a day off. The rich, the poor, the slaves, farm animals. Everyone got a day off. It's the fourth commandment. The thing about the fourth commandment is it doesn't actually say what it looks like not to work.

And so what religious hearts do is they add a whole lot of rules to it, and that's what they did. By this time, there were 39 rules describing what you can't do on the Sabbath. And in trying to define the Sabbath, they actually go further than God did.

The Sabbath becomes about what you aren't supposed to do. And stony hearts like this, though, right? They like making things into rules because that makes it obeyable.

And then you can say, yes, I did the thing, and so now I'm cool with God because I did the thing, or I didn't do the thing. I'm cool with God. They can look down on others as a result. And that's what the religious types were doing here to Jesus and the disciples.

[14:36] The gift of the Sabbath had turned into a burden. And they were trapped in this tireless effort to try and prove themselves to God.

And we do this sometimes, don't we? We fall into this trap. Maybe it's not the Sabbath, but it would be other things. Other little rules we feel like we must obey. We make this beautiful relationship with Jesus about rule keeping.

And sadly, what can happen after a while is you just get tired. You just get so tired of it. So tired, you just throw out the whole God thing because it ceased becoming this beautiful relationship with Jesus and became about just being a nice Christian, doing nice things.

Now, we do need Sabbath. But we need what Sabbath points to. You know, we need that deep inner rest. And it's not going to come from just being a nice Christian and doing nice things.

It's not right practices. It's not avoiding certain things. It's we need the Lord of the Sabbath. We need the one who invented the Sabbath to invade our heart and turn our stony hearts to fleshy hearts.

[15:48] And that's what Jesus is trying to communicate to them. So in verse 27, he fires back at them. He says, the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. The things that you're doing is trying to say these things that you're trying to do are not reaping the benefits because you've made it about the rules, not what the rules point to.

And then he quite cheekily says, have you read about David? David, like, have you guys read your Bibles? Have you read the famous story about the famous guy who did the thing when he's eating the consecrated bread?

Have you remember that? Jesus says, if David can do it, I can do it, which is quite a scandalous thing to say because what he's saying is, he never denies that the Sabbath is a good thing. He just says, his whole argument hinges on who David was and therefore who he is.

He doesn't want to leave anyone in doubt with what he's saying. So he says in verse 28, the Son of Man is Lord even over the Sabbath. This whole thing is about pointing to me, he says.

Okay, let me just pause here for a moment. This is very dense, I know, but it's just very dense. So let me give you 40,000 feet here before finishing up in about five minutes, all right?

[17:02] So I went to the P&E; a while ago, do you know? And it was great. I went to this, I don't know what you call it, a concert, like a display.

These Chinese gymnasts, and they're doing really cool stuff. At one point they did this balancing act where this woman came out and she had, do you know the rods with the plates on them, spinning plates? Incredible, incredible.

This woman had like four in each hand spinning these plates while balancing on her head or something like that. It was astonishing, amazing, right? Exhausting to watch. Now, I bring that up because this is like, this is what it must be to be like a Pharisee here.

So committed to their tradition. It must feel like they're just spinning plates the whole time, trying to do the right thing, desperately trying to do the right thing, but finding no rest.

Again, there's nothing wrong with Sabbath. There's nothing wrong with fasting, but our hearts are so tricky. We can convince ourselves that we treat them like these spiritual life hacks that we think will give us the inner peace that we need if we just do the right sort of things.

[18:07] But it's only Jesus who can give us that rest. So, in summary of scene three here, Jesus says, the Lord of all those rules you're trying to keep is among you.

I can give you rest for yourselves. But hard hearts, sometimes they just want rules. Because they're easy, right? Easy. I can do that. I win. It's not Christianity.

Okay, final scene. Chapter three, verses one to six. And this is so brutal. It's a story of Jesus healing a man on the Sabbath. And the Pharisees are just whining about it. Essentially, it's a story, again, of great contrast between what Jesus is trying to do and what the religious elite are trying to

do.

Jesus is trying to give life, and they are trying to plan for his death. So, a few more details there. Jesus heads to the local synagogue again. It's the Sabbath, and the Pharisees are watching. And they are hoping he will heal somebody. Because that was against the Sabbath rules. It's a big no-no. They are hoping he will heal somebody, so they have this big gotcha moment.

[19 : 12] And you sort of get the sense that they actually planted this guy with a withered hand there. Now, Jesus knows all this. He knows what's going on. But he invites the drummer anyway.

He calls the guy up with the withered hand. The word withered there in Greek, it's a death word highlighting the contrast. So, he calls this guy up very dramatic. Come here. Guy's standing beside him.

And he turns to the Pharisees, and Jesus is trying to communicate to them how ridiculous their position is, and how stony and hard their hearts are. And he says to them in verse 4, he says to them, Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or do harm?

To save or to kill? But they were silent. Do you see the irony here? They despised Jesus for doing good on the Sabbath.

But they think it's okay to conspire to kill him on the Sabbath. So, the question he asks them is, what's the right thing to do on the Sabbath?

[20 : 17] His aim is to show these guys how far their hearts have moved from God's intent for that day. And how do they respond? Just a very guilty silence.

And what happens next? Verse 5 and 6. We get an insight into the mind of Christ here. Verse 5 and 6. He looked around at them with anger. Grieved at the hardness of heart.

He said to the man, stretch out your hands. And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored. And the Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians how to destroy him.

He looks around at anger, and then he heals. Here we have the righteous wrath of God and his tender mercy in just this, in a few moments here.

And how do the onlookers respond? They plot to kill. I'll add this. The Herodians were a political party. They were nationalists. They supported the Roman puppet King Herod.

[21 : 19] The Pharisees, a religious party. They didn't normally get on, these groups. These people didn't get on. But there's this one thing they were united on.

The one thing they were united on is they joined forces to kill Jesus. It's just astonishing. Okay. And just another story of the goodness and the welcome and the restoration that Jesus has on offer for all of us.

Contrasted to hard hearts. Let me finish up here very quickly. Four stories. Four stories. The welcome of Jesus. I hope you know the welcome of Jesus.

I hope that's what you know. The welcome of Jesus. I also hope you know that our hearts are a bit tricky. And Jesus needs to continue to do work on them.

So two things to finish off in two sentences. One. One. Isn't Jesus awesome? Isn't he just awesome?

[22 : 29] And two. Jesus says to you. If you are just spinning plates. Trying to be a nice person. Just trying to do all the right things.

All the right practices. To kind of, you know. Earn your way into God's favor. Jesus says to you. Stop. Exhausting yourself.

Come. Rest. It is finished. Amen. Amen. Amen.