

When Gospels Collide, PART I – Mark 2:13-17

Series: Look and Live #8

Everyone is born into this world with a *gospel* (we'll call it the world's gospel). Everyone grows up thinking that there is *some good news*, that there is some way for them to live happily and to enjoy the benefits of whatever god they believe in and serve. They believe that there is some way to have the wrong things made right. They have a gospel of *how their god will be pleased with them* and bring them joy and satisfaction.

I would enjoy going through all the major religions in the world, one by one with you, and showing you that they all share some fundamental principles concerning man and their god. Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, Roman Catholicism, [good-old-country boy who believes in God but doesn't think he needs to go to church]-*ism*, [people who live in the city and think they don't need God]-*ism*, and Pharisaism, all of them have the same *fundamental* gospel. They differ in the particulars, but at root, it is the exact same bad gospel.

Unfortunately, many Americans have grown up in enough of a Christianized environment that they believe they've heard the Gospel and that they've then rejected the Gospel. I am convinced that most of them are wrong. What they heard and absorbed growing up was not the real Gospel. It was rather the same old world-gospel that everyone is born with, only this gospel had a particularly Christian flavor.

You know, you can take a scoop of shaved ice, throw it in a cup and dump sugar-syrup all over it, call it a snow-cone and sell it for \$4. But it's still ice isn't it? You added some flavor to it but it's still just ice. That's what most of us have grown up with. The same *ice* as the rest of the world with just a Christian flavor added to it.

But one day, 2000 years ago, *gospels* collided. The gospel of the world collided with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And, as we'll see, they are *fundamentally different!* If you could take all of the religions and philosophies and belief systems and ways of life and put them together, there is only *one* that would collide with all the rest: the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And it's not another cup of ice with different flavored syrup. It's not just a religion, it's something altogether *different*.

Reading of the text.

In Bible times, Israel didn't have an IRS. Instead, they had a special group of people called *tax collectors*. These men placed little shelters strategically along busy paths from town to town. On this particular day, a tax collector named *Levi* was stationed near the Sea of Galilee. As he looked up, it seemed like a *mob* was headed his way. As it passed by his booth, the man in the middle of it all, the man named *Jesus*, stopped, looked Levi in the eye and demanded, "Follow me." Levi, leaving his booth, leaving *everything*, followed him.

Now tax collectors of this day were not official employees of the government. The Romans permitted Jewish men to go out and collect the taxes on their behalf, but the Romans didn't *pay* the tax collectors a salary. Instead, they permitted the collectors to charge people whatever they could get them to pay, and they in turn could keep anything above and beyond what Rome required as their salary.

Therefore the Jews *hated* their tax collectors. Not only did they charge them corrupt rates, but the worst thing about is that, these were their own brothers! And we don't want to excuse them. Sometimes people make Levi sound good. They really were doing bad things, Levi included. Yet, as Jesus sees Levi he commands this despised traitor to become one of his chosen, special disciples.

Out of all the men Jesus saw and passed by that day, out of all the religious men following Jesus that day as part of his posse, Jesus commands the worst of the worst, the putrid, hated tax-collector to be part of his inner circle, to become his disciple. But, things get even worse. When Levi obeys and follows Jesus, they actually give up their lake-side stroll and go instead to his house where they laid down and *ate* together.

That meal was not like a meal any of us have ever had. Meals were a big social event. The meal itself was different because you basically *shared* the food in a family style set-up. Instead of sitting in chairs, everyone laid down with their heads pointing toward a short horse-shoe shaped table. So it was much more intimate and a much bigger social event than we're used to. Therefore eating together was a sign that you were friends and buddy-buddy with the people you were eating with.

Not only does Jesus lay down to eat with Levi, but Levi actually invited all of his tax-collecting extortionist friends and a group of people the Pharisees called *sinners* to eat with Jesus as well. (*Sinners were Jews who did not abide by the religious laws of the day like laws for the Sabbath and for staying ceremonially clean. They were rebels and we're banned from the synagogue gatherings, and Levi invited a whole bunch of 'em over.*) For the scribes who were present that day, this was all too much. They quietly asked Jesus' disciples, "Is he *really* eating with these tax collectors, these *sinners*?"

Now you might think that the scribes asked a polite question and that they really were curious about the answer. But when you read the story as part of Mark's big story, there is no way that the scribes were asking an innocent, genuine question like that.

Chapter 3 of Mark starts with the scribes and Pharisees now *watching Jesus* to see if he'll heal a man on the Sabbath. Mark says that they wanted to find something against him so that they'll be able to charge him with something and get him in legal trouble. Jesus does heal that man, and so verse 6, "The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him."

In chapter one of Mark, the scribes and Pharisees were basically neutral to Jesus. In the first story in chapter three, they're *searching* for something they can use to destroy him. They find it, and they come up with a plan to have him killed. So then, chapter two is about how we get from neutral to set against destroying him. Chapter two is the story of these groups turning *against* Jesus.

Back to their question: "Why does Jesus eat with the sinners and tax collectors?" It's not a sincere question that's looking for a polite response. They're actually saying, "*What* in the world is he doing eating with sinners and tax collectors!?" They're finding guilt with him in their question.

Jesus actually speaks up and answers *for* his disciples saying: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." **That's the story.**

What are we supposed to make of this? Mark's main point is to show the difference between Jesus' Gospel and the Pharisees'. Mark two-fold hope is that we'll understand why the Pharisees end up crucifying the Lord of glory and that we'll love Jesus' Gospel. This wasn't just a little disagreement. This was a clash of their gospel versus his. They didn't like his, so they killed him. So that's what we're going to try to see. ***Four ways that the two gospels clash or collide.***

- 1) The gospels clash over *who* we are
 - a) One of the most fundamental differences between the real Gospel and every *other* gospel in the world is in *how we think about ourselves*, how we understand who we are.
 - b) *Explanation of Pelagius and the system of theology called Pelagianism.*
 - i) Man has an innately good heart. He isn't born into sin. Man, on his own, is essentially good and that he has the ability within himself to please God.
 - ii) Pelagianism officially *condemned* by the church, but most Americans (and even many "Christians") are full-fledged Pelagians at heart.
 - iii) The Pharisees were essentially preaching Pelagianism. It's the exact same gospel we see all over the world!

The Pharisees' Gospel

- 2) When a man like Levi hosted a special dinner, only certain people were invited. It wasn't a buffet; it was an invitation-only thing. But it was custom that, for people who *wanted* to be there but weren't invited, they could stand up against the wall quietly and just observe the dinner while the guests eat.
 - a) Amazingly, here the ones invited to come and dine with Jesus are the scum of the earth. The ones relegated to simply observing the dinner from the walls are the trained, devoted, zealous for good works scribes and Pharisees.
 - b) That made their hearts reel with jealousy. "Why are *we* here and why are *they* there!?! If he eats with anybody, it should be us!" In their hearts they were *different* from the sinners.
 - i) Just in the simple fact *alone* that they would choose to designate a specific group of people *as sinners* tells you that they considered themselves *non-sinners*, different.
 - ii) In their hearts, the Pharisees were good people. They paid their taxes. They read their Bibles *every single day*. They were in synagogue every single week. They observed strict rules and enforced harsh treatment on themselves, all because they wanted to work for and earn God's favor. They were the good people of the land.
 - iii) The tax collectors were *bad* people because they were not religious and did not practice strict religious principles. So they called them the sinners.
 - c) That's exactly where their pride came from. That's where *all* pride comes from. The assumption and belief in our heart (whether we say it, whether we just believe it, or whether we just act as if it were true) that we are good and other people are bad.
 - d) That's what Pelagius was teaching, that most of us are good. That's exactly what the *world* teaches us. We're almost all of us good; we just need to find our common humanity and we'll all be okay. Only certain people are bad and we should pity them but stay away from them. That's the world's gospel.

The Clash Between Gospels

- 3) Jesus has a fundamentally *different* Gospel than the Pharisees, than Pelagius, and than the whole world. At this one foundational point, the two gospels collide.
 - a) When the Pharisees asked the disciples the scornful question, “Why is he eating with bad people,” Jesus answered, verse 17, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”
 - b) Of course, Jesus is not telling the Pharisees that they don’t need him because they are righteous and healthy. Actually, he’s doing just the opposite. He’s really rebuking them and correcting their foolishness.
 - c) If the question is: “Why does Jesus eat with sinners?” The answer is: “*Who else is there to eat with? Who would you rather him eat with, Pharisees?*”
 - d) The Pharisees had a fundamentally flawed assumption about themselves, and about the world.? Their gospel (the *world’s gospel*) says that there is such a thing as a *non-sinner*. Therefore they can divide up the world between sinners and non-sinners. According to their gospel, if Jesus really was who he said he was he would want to go and eat with them because *they* were obviously part of the *non-sinners* (after all, they were so religious).

Jesus’ Gospel (and the Bible’s teaching on sin and humanity)

- 4) Here’s what the Bible says:
 - a) God created us free. He created Adam and Eve in the Garden as our first parents and as the head of our human race. They would represent the entire world. God gave them to them a clean slate and a clean heart. Then God gave them a command. At that moment, they could choose to do what God said, to live in submission to God, or to disobey him and rebel against him.
 - i) You know what happened. They choose the latter. They choose rebellion and disobedience when they ate from the Tree.
 - ii) Because Adam was, is, both our *physical father* (we all literally descended from him) and because he is our *representative head* (God designated him as the head of the human race such that what he did would be counted to us), therefore when he fell, we fell.
 - iii) Romans 5:12 “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because *all sinned*.”
 - (1) Sin came into the world through one man: Adam. When Adam sinned, we all sinned. And when death came to Adam, sin and death came to us as well.
 - (2) Sin and death came to the whole human race and now we all experience it in its fullness.
 - (3) Sin has taken root in every human’s heart. It’s not just that we sometimes *do* bad things, it’s that we are now born with sin actually in our hearts, ruling us, influencing us, holding us under its sway. We are both slaves to and lovers with sin. We are no longer free like Adam was, now we always choose sin over God.
 - iv) “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.” (Ps. 51:5) David was saying that he wasn’t born as a good man. He was born as a sinner and he’s been sinning from the beginning. He’s saying that the corruption of Adam has attended him from birth. That describes all of mankind, myself included.
 - b) Paul describes the state of all mankind from Adam until Christ, “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”

- c) The Pharisees didn't believe it. (Many in the Christian church today don't believe it either.) In their hearts, that *they* were righteous, that they understood, that they sought God, that they were good.
 - d) And because they thought and felt that way, when they looked at people who were not like them, they exalted themselves over those people and arrogantly labeled those others as the world's sinners.
- 5) One really really interesting thing about this story in Mark is that Jesus himself seems almost to use this exact situation in another story that he told. (Luke 18)
- a) He says that one day, two men went to the temple to pray: a Pharisee and a publican (or a tax collector).
 - b) The Pharisee "*stood by himself*" because in his heart, he was *better* than the rest and he was a *good person* compared to everyone else. He even went so far as to thank God saying, "God, I thank you that I am not like other men, like this *tax collector* here."
 - c) But that tax collector stood far off, knowing he was unworthy to come before God, and he simply prayed, "God be merciful to me, a *sinner!*"
 - d) It's the same thing that happens in Mark 2, and it's the fundamental clash between the Pharisees' gospel and Jesus' Gospel. The one said, "Thank you that I am not a sinner like him." And the other said, "I'm a sinner. I'm a sinner who sins."
 - e) Jesus concludes by saying that the tax collector was right then *justified* whereas the Pharisee was not. (Justified means being counted as *righteous* by God, before God, even though you're still a sinner.)
 - f) How interesting that *the one* who thanked God that he was so righteous was not considered righteous, and that the one who confessed that he *wasn't righteous* then *became* righteous.
 - g) That's the difference between our Gospel and the entire system of the world! **Only in coming face to face with our wretched unrighteousness do we gloriously become righteous through Jesus.**
 - h) **If you want to maintain your righteousness on your own, from birth, in your life, in your activities, in your own strength, then you will not know the righteousness of God.**
- 6) All mankind is corrupt. If you are a living human being, then until Jesus Christ gives you the gift of new life, you have a desire in your heart to rebel against God. We have sin in our hearts that will lead us to commit a lifetime of sins against God.
- a) We will not love the Lord our God, nor worship him alone. We will sin because we are sinners.
 - b) On our own, we're going to proceed farther and farther *away* from God as opposed to drawing nearer to him. In short, we're hopelessly lost and depraved.
 - c) At all times, at any given moment, what the world deserves is God's punishment, instant death, and condemnation.

Application

- 7) Do you know the *true story* of the tower of Siloam? (It really happened.)
- a) The tower of Siloam was probably a look-out tower or a guard tower along the city wall of Jerusalem, somewhere near the pool of Siloam. Tragically the tower fell and killed 18 people (possibly injuring many more). This was a very great and much talked about tragedy.
 - b) Soon after the tower fell, Jesus' disciples were asking him why these kinds of things happened to people. Jesus' answer to his disciples was [**BEWARE, this is life-changing**], "Do you think

that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but **unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.**”

- c) Jesus says, first of all, that they are not worse *offenders* than the rest of Jerusalem. He doesn't say innocent. He calls them all offenders. All of Jerusalem were all *equal offenders* before God.
 - d) Then he says, “Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.” In the same manner that *they* died, we will *all* die unless we repent.
 - e) His disciples were saying, “Jesus, weren't those good people? Why did God do that to them?” And I say, “God, why did that have to happen to this person? Why did this sickness have to come? Why did this tragedy have to happen?”
 - f) Jesus says, “Ryan, you are asking me the wrong question. You should be asking, me instead, ‘God, why didn't the tower fall on me? Why wasn't I standing under the tower that day?’”
 - i) Jesus isn't saying that those 18 people were being punished that day because they had sinned against God and we're especially bad sinners.
 - ii) But he *was* saying that that would have been just punishment for them, and for all of Jerusalem, and for us!
 - iii) All of us *deserve* such a display of God's eternal wrath, and we'll get it, Jesus says, unless we repent and trust in him to reconcile us to the Father.
 - g) When people ask me the question, “Why do bad things happen to good people?” I just ask them right back, “Why do good things happen to bad people? Explain that!”
 - h) Because that's reality. Every minute of every hour, a million good things are happening around the world to a million bad people. We all deserve crushing towers, we're all (apart from God intervening) living in rebellion against God. Yet, he continues to send good things our way.
 - i) How is it that I was born with a sinful heart, denied his Truth, and suppressed the knowledge of him, and yet I've seen more rainbows than I can count, that I have stood at the mouth of the Grand Canyon and struggled to find my breath? How is it that today, I love God, know God, and he calls me his son?
 - j) See, the teaching of original sin (this teaching of the Bible that since Adam we're all born into corruption and in rebellion against God) *enables* me to see that every little good thing in my life is an underserved gift of God's grace. If I deserve the tower falling and I get a good evening of fellowship with my friends, that's grace! Forty million little gifts of grace everyday that I do not deserve, and that **I only have because Jesus Christ secured the grace of God** on my behalf on his cross are given to me by my Father.
 - i) The sun warms my cold face because of the cross of Jesus Christ.
 - ii) My house protects me from winds and rain because of the cross of Jesus Christ.
 - k) O what a worthless gospel the Pharisees believed. What a worthless gospel the world loves. What a worthless gospel so many in the church live out, thinking that Jesus is just a Band-Aid who heals a little cut on their otherwise healthy heart.
- 8) Instead, we embrace the truth that God created Adam and Eve with the ability to obey him but that they subsequently *ruined* themselves (and all of their descendants) when they rebelled. We embrace that all mankind is born into that slavery to sin and rebellion against God. We also embrace the glorious truth that Jesus Christ can and will forgive us our rebellion, reconcile us to God, and restore to us a heart willing and able to please, honor, and obey our God into eternity.

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