

When Gospels Collide, PART II – Mark 2:13-17
Series: Look and Live #9

Two weeks ago we started a sermon “When Gospels Collide” and we’re going to pick that back up with Part II. Remember this is the story of Jesus calling a tax collector named Levi (a.k.a. Matthew). After Jesus calls Levi to be his disciple, he goes over to Levi’s house and this former tax collector throws a big dinner-party. Jesus and his new disciple Levi, instead of inviting the learned and zealous Pharisees invite instead Levi’s tax-collecting friends (who were hated and despised by the Jews for being corrupt and sinful) and they invited another group of folks the Pharisees called “sinners”. The Pharisees didn’t like that very much so they began to complain to Jesus’ disciples, but Jesus cuts their complaining off by rebuking them. **Read Mark 2:13-17.**

In chapter one of Mark, everybody seems neutral toward Jesus as though they haven’t quite made up their minds. But by the first paragraph in chapter 3 the Pharisees were looking to find something on Jesus, and they did. In verse 6 they all got together to figure out how to have him killed. That means that chapter two is the story of a massive downward spiraling of the relationship between Jesus and the Pharisees, leaving them at the end of chapter two with a bitter hate for Jesus.

That’s what led us to conclude last time that this story is not just an innocent exchange between Jesus and religious leaders. They weren’t asking the disciples an honest to goodness question like, “What is Jesus’ theory in eating with tax collectors and sinners?” This question really isn’t a question at all. It’s more an expression of their disgust and disapproval of what Jesus is doing. It’s much like when my mother would walk into my room when I was a child and yell, “What in the world do you think you’re doing!?” She didn’t really want an answer. The Pharisees are rebuking Jesus with their question, but they don’t have the guts to say it to his face so they whine to the disciples.

So this is the story of how the Gospel of Jesus Christ *clashes* and *collides head-on* with the beliefs and assumptions of the Pharisees. But more than that, we could replace the Pharisees with any other religion or organization or philosophy in the world and this same *clash* would take place. In the Pharisees the whole world is complaining about what Jesus is doing. So once again we want to see how the Gospel of Jesus collides with the gospel of the world.

- 1) When Jesus decides to pick of all people a tax collector, when Jesus decides to *pass by* the Pharisees and choose an infamous sinner instead, the gospels clash over why God chooses us.
 - a) The world says, “God helps those who help themselves.” That’s probably the most often quoted Bible teaching that is not actually in the Bible. Benjamin Franklin coined that phrase (Poor Richard's Almanac, 1757). Of course Franklin was a *non-Christian* deist!
 - b) The Pharisees agreed with Benjamin Franklin. “Jesus, if he chooses anybody, should *choose us* because we have worked hard, we have tried hard, we have lived so much better than the tax collectors.”
 - c) The world is *wrong*. There is no reason that God chooses certain people; there is nothing in them that causes God to choose them; there is nothing that makes them stand out. God chooses people because they are sick and dying and sinners. (And that describes the whole world.)

- d) Beyond that there is no earthly reason for why God chooses us. Why did God choose me to be his disciple? Not because I was helping myself. Not because I was stronger, smarter, faster, better, more holy than another person.
- 2) Number three, the gospels clash over the question: how do we please God?
- a) If you sat down today and said, “Okay, I really want to please God this week. I should try to do more____” or “I should try and be more ____”. How would you fill in that blank?
 - b) The Pharisees’ answer was: I should try to be more zealous to uphold the Law. I should be more scrupulous to discipline myself and fulfill every jot and tittle of the Law of God.
 - i) The Pharisees believed that the reason the Romans were currently ruling their country and occupying their land was because God was punishing them for disobeying his Law.
 - ii) So to fix that they became Israel’s *Law Police*. They tried to define for themselves and for everybody else too, exactly what counted as obedience and what counted as disobedience, and then they tried to get everyone to live by those rules.
 - iii) They felt that if they could get their fellow countrymen to focus enough on the Law and to do enough good by the Law, that God would be happy with them and that he would drive out the Romans and restore them.
 - iv) So for the Pharisees the way to God’s blessing and salvation was through hard work and close observance of the Law. When it came to that, there was no one who excelled the Pharisees.
 - c) You can understand why they were aggravated when they were forced to stand against the walls of Levi’s house *watching* this meal as Jesus eats, not with them, but with *public sinners*.
 - i) In the Pharisees’ minds, if God sent his messenger and his anointed one to come and save his people, and if Jesus really was that man sent from God, then Jesus should love the Pharisees (and hang out with them throw dinner parties for them).
 - ii) Jesus should grovel over them and be commending them in the streets, because they were such good followers of God and because they worked so hard to get others to be followers of God. That’s what he should be doing if he really *was* from God.
 - iii) In their hearts and minds God was pleased with them. They had worked hard and they had earned God’s favor. God should accept their hard work and give them preferred standing. If Jesus wasn’t pleased with them because of their works he must not be from God.
 - iv) So when Jesus passes over the Pharisees and chooses instead a tax collector, and when they have to sit back and just *watch* this debacle take place, they begin to make up their minds to *hate* and *reject* Jesus. This won’t end until he’s dead.

So what are we supposed to learn?

- d) Jesus’ actions teach us that, contrary to what they believed, they had not earned God’s favor; and they did not deserve special treatment because of their good works any more than the corrupt tax collector Levi.
- e) This is the number one place the world collides with the Gospel of Jesus. This is that *one thing* that makes the Gospel of Jesus so different than every other gospel the world has to offer.
- f) No matter what religion you’re talking about, no matter what version you’re referring to, (whether it’s fake Christianity, monks and nuns of Roman Catholicism, or a thousand people who work for the State in Jeff and don’t think they have any need for the church) the *world* believes this exact thing: we *earn* our salvation, we *work* for our salvation, we *please God* by our efforts and zeal.

- i) It's similar to Dad telling Junior, "Clean your room and I'll give you your weekly allowance."
- ii) Well Junior cleans his room, now he knows that when Dad comes home he has earned merit, he has earned Dad's favor and Dad is going to give him his allowance.
- iii) That's where the Pharisees thought they were. That's where the *world* thinks they are as earning an allowance from God.
 - (1) *God, I've tried to be a good person, I've paid my taxes, I've done this and I've done that, now when I die, it's time to sweep me up into heaven and give me my allowance!*
 - (2) *I've earned it. I've worked hard. I certainly don't deserve Hell.*
- iv) The Pharisees were some of the most devout, religious, spiritually hard-working people you've ever met.
- v) If this were today, these were the church people. These were people *in the* church building every time the doors were open. They were here Sunday morning and Sunday night and Wednesday night. They home-schooled their kids and they fasted every single Monday and Thursday; they refused to go to the movies because of the bad content, and they gave faithfully to the church every single week, never missing a Sunday. These were the "*good church people, good Christian people.*" And in their hearts, they knew they had earned that allowance from God.
- g) But when Jesus comes onto the scene as the Son of God, he seems to indicate that all their hard work and service had accomplished *nothing* before the Lord.
- h) It's almost as if to Jesus our *good works* aren't good at all! Jesus is saying that the Pharisees were just as sick, just as sinful, just as helpless as all the rest.
- i) To see the difference between the world's beliefs and what Jesus teaches, think about human beings as fruit-bearing trees.
 - i) **The world thinks** that people have both good fruit and that people have bad fruit.
 - ii) We do something good, there's a piece of good fruit. We do something bad, there's a piece of bad. Then on the Day of Judgment God will put our good fruit on one side and our bad on another side, and if we have more good than bad, we'll go to heaven or paradise.
 - iii) **But the Bible teaches** that our problem is not that we have both good fruit and bad fruit in our lives, because we are all born in Adam our real problem is that our *roots* have become bad and diseased.
 - iv) When we sometimes produce what looks like a healthy apple, if you bite into it, you'll find that it's actually quite diseased and rotten. We don't really produce good fruit *at all!*
 - v) The heart is rotten and from a rotten heart comes only rotten fruit.
- j) Now it should be really clear. There is absolutely no way that we can ever earn God's favor by our fruit, by our deeds, by our works, or by our good living because every piece of fruit is laced with rebellion. If you think about our sin in terms of debt before God, every thing we do builds our debt and never takes away from it because everything we do has the taste of rebellion against God.
 - i) We can sometimes *outwardly* do things that would make God pleased, but they are always coming from a rotten heart that is at rebellion against him.
 - ii) So ultimately, it comes down to this: on the Day of Judgment, there won't be any good fruit to weigh against the bad.
- k) Now we can really understand why Jesus says what he did when he said, Pharisees, "those who are well have no need of a physician."

- i) He was saying, “You foolish Pharisees, you think that I came to tell the good people that they were doing good and to tell the bad people that they needed to do a better job. In actuality, I came to tell you all that you are sick with sin and that you all need me, the only Physician that can heal you.”
 - ii) God did not come in the flesh to go around patting the good people on their backs saying, “I owe you one. You sure have made me glad and now I’m going to reward you.”
 - iii) God took on the flesh because the world had rotten hearts and God was the only one who could change that.
- l) This is why Christians are so *adamant* in insisting that we are saved by grace alone. We don’t work for our salvation. It is a lie from Hell to say that we are saved by our good works working together with God’s grace. If we have to contribute *anything*, we’re damned! If we have diseased roots, how could we ever be justified if we had to somehow earn it? Salvation is only by God’s free, grace bestowal. It is *all his doing, all by his free grace!*
- m) So I started by asking, If you sat down and said, “I really want to please God today, I should try and do more ___” or “I should try and be more ___”. How would you fill in that blank?
- i) By being a good citizen. By being very *earnest* and *passionate* in whatever I do. By doing your best.
 - ii) By attending church, participating on a few committees, going to Sunday School, and by making my kids do the same?
- n) The Gospel of Jesus Christ answers that question:
- i) As we are born into this world, we cannot please God. There is no amount of good works, no amount of “I’m sorry God”, there is *nothing we can do* to please God! We have displeased him, we are under his wrath, and we cannot do anything to assuage that.
 - ii) But if we can’t do anything in ourselves to please God, the good news is that Jesus Christ has already *perfectly pleased* God.
 - (1) *His* heart and roots were not rotten, like ours. His life was perfect, and he *pleased* the Father perfectly.
 - (2) The Heavenly Father was, and is, and will be forever perfectly pleased with Jesus’ life and death.
 - iii) Although there is nothing that *I* can do to please God, the most outstanding truth is that God the Father is willing to consider what Jesus did as mine! He is willing to make Jesus Christ my new representative and to all the sudden be infinitely pleased with me, even as he is pleased with Jesus Christ his Son.
 - iv) He has earned his favor!
 - v) And what does he call me to do? Just *trust* that he has done that! Just *trust* and *believe* that God has and will do that for me and then begin to live as though it were reality. Before I can ever have it, I’ve got to realize that there’s nothing I can do to get it. Only what Jesus has done, that’s all my hope, my plea, not my dead, poisoned, rotten fruit.
- o) For those listening for whom God has not counted the work of Jesus, (whether you know that that is you or you think it is a possibility) I want to acknowledge your presence today and tell you that I’m happy that you’re here to hear God’s Word, and that I would be ecstatic to talk to you about what you’re feeling and thinking and more about the Gospel. That’s why my phone numbers are for (573-298-1559, or pastor@hickoryhillbaptistchurch.org) Use them!

- p) For those who *are* Christians, let me speak to you for a moment because most of what I've said this morning applies to us *before* Christ purchased us and before the Father gave us new life.
- q) Sometime in our lives, once we received the benefits of what Jesus did on the cross, God gave us a new heart that was no longer rotten and was actually able to do *truly good things* from a *good* heart. (That doesn't mean that we start *earning anything from God* because the reason we have a new, good heart, and the reason that good heart is producing good fruit, is because of his grace! We are eternally debtors to God's grace. Let's just not forget it.)
- r) To Christians, this sounds all familiar.
- s) Yet there are many times that we find our still sinful hearts reverting back to that old gospel of the world. Even though we *know* the Gospel of Jesus, even though we *know* that we cannot please God on our own, even though we *know* that Jesus Christ is the only one who can and has done that and that he is my only hope, still we find ourselves putting confidence and trust in the things that *we do*.
- t) So here are two places that we most often show, despite what we say, that our hearts have gotten us *trusting* in ourselves instead of Christ: **in suffering, and in our walk with God.**
 - i) In the midst of suffering, we start weighing good works and bad works. We start saying, either about ourselves or about other people suffering, "God, they we don't deserve this! We've done *this* and we've done *that* and we've been in church and we're a good family!"
 - ii) What are we doing? We are putting our confidence in what we've done. We're assuming that we've got good fruit that God hasn't given us but that we have credit for. We're surrendering the Gospel. (Galatians 3:10)
 - iii) Or in a much lesser but practical way, we do this in our daily walk with God.
 - (1) We feel good about our spirituality when we're regular in church
 - (2) We feel good about our relationship with God when we've been reading our Bibles regularly and praying every morning.
 - (3) Then all the sudden we miss a few Bible readings. We skip church a couple of times to go to a ball game. We're a little irregular. All the sudden we start feeling guilty, we start having the feeling that we really need to get back in church because God is not pleased with us like this.
 - (4) Again that is just proof to us that in our hearts, we believe that our good religious works make God happy with us, and that the lack of them makes God displeased with us.
- u) Here's the truth: as Christians God could not be any more pleased with you than he is right now! Just as amazingly, he will never be any less pleased with you than he is right now.
- v) There are only two options:
 - i) Either God is completely, perfectly, and eternally pleased and satisfied with you because the righteousness of Jesus has been applied to you.
 - ii) Or God is completely and entirely *displeased* with you, wrathful toward you, because you have no righteousness and no merit before him.
- w) There are no people on the fringe. There are no people somewhere in between. You are either in Christ or still in Adam.
- x) And someone might say, "Why would you tell people this? Isn't this de-motivating for Christians? Isn't this going to make Christians try less and strive less? And isn't this going to make non-Christians *hope-less* to tell them that they cannot do anything to please God?"
 - i) To answer **the first question**: if hearing this leads someone to say, "Wow, I guess I don't have to worry about sin anymore, and I guess I don't have to think about striving for

holiness and godliness anymore.” That’s no Christian. If you want confirmation of God’s grace in your life, if listening to this message and hearing this truth has made your heart *swell* and if you feel enlarged by the overwhelming grace of God, if you feel the overpowering sense of unworthiness to know such a God, and if you sense an overwhelming *love* for so gracious a God, that’s what this truth does in the heart of a Christian. Wonderfully, for a true Christian the *freeness* of God’s grace *compels* us to love him and serve him more. *If it doesn’t, God’s grace is absent from your heart!* So no, I’m not worried about that.

- ii) To answer **the second question**: am I not afraid that this will leave non-Christians hopeless? That answer would be yes.
 - (1) The difficulty is that if you perceive that you are still in Adam and not in Christ, then I so *desire* that you feel almost entirely hopeless. I want you to be left standing on the cliff of despair and helplessness on the precipice of eternal Hell. *Almost*. I want you to stand there ready to slip, ready to jump, ready to fall, and I want you to look up and see that there is only *one, one single* hope for the salvation of your soul.
 - (2) I want you to see that in everything else, everywhere else, in every *one* else, you are completely and absolutely hopeless because you cannot please God and you cannot undo what you have done.
 - (3) But then I want you to see that Jesus Christ *can* please God, and that he is your one and only hope. But that he *is your HOPE!*
- iii) Stop trying to earn eternal life. Stop thinking that he owes you something. Stop thinking that God must be pleased with you because of your good life. Give up all of that false hope, and cry out this instant to God in despair saying, “Jesus is my only hope! Jesus is my only and he is my every hope.” Plead with God to give you the favor and the righteousness of Jesus Christ alone! As you cling to Jesus as your only possibility of obtaining the favor of God, completely free, completely undeserved, he will be pleased to give it to you.

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