

When Religion Is Big and Jesus Is Small – Mark 2:23-3:6
Series: Look and Live #11

Illustration: *wearing high heels and being out of proportion.*

If we are born-again, we should feel *wrong* and *uneasy* whenever we see Christ being minimized and made small. When we ourselves or when others exalt other things or lower Christ so that he just feels smaller. That's what happened in this text. **Read Mark 2:23-3:6.**

God commanded that his people *rest* from their work and labors from Friday evening to Saturday evening. The name 'Sabbath' comes from the Hebrew verb meaning "to cease from labors or rest from work." The Jewish people in Jesus' day took this *very seriously*. Deliberately violating Sabbath law was punishable by death.

By the time of Jesus' earthly ministry the Sabbath had become the most important aspect of their religion and identity because it made them special (none of their neighbors observed anything like a Sabbath). The rabbis and Pharisees in Jesus' day created this system of rules and laws regarding observing the Sabbath. God was clear about not working, but he wasn't all that clear about what it meant "to work" and "to rest". They made laws and rules to show precisely what constituted work.

Of course, obvious forms of work were forbidden like plowing, hunting, and butchering. But some of the surprising things you couldn't do included: tying or loosening knots, sewing more than one stitch, writing more than one letter, setting a dislocated foot or hand, or even repairing a fallen roof ...One of the craziest rules was that if a building fell down on the Sabbath, enough rubble could be removed to discover if any victims were dead or alive. If alive, they could be rescued, but if dead, the corpses must be left until sunset. (The Gospel According to Mark, "Pillar Commentary", 93-94)

Among those *strange* rules that the Pharisees and rabbis developed was the following: even though on the other six days of the week God permitted (in Deuteronomy 23:25) a person to munch on grain as he's passing through his neighbor's field, that's allowed Sunday through Friday, but they decided that it was work and therefore *not* allowed on the Sabbath.

When the disciples start grabbing heads of wheat as they're walking with Jesus through this field on a Sabbath day, the Pharisee's rebuke Jesus: "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?"

Amazingly, Jesus doesn't *debate* the Pharisees about whether what the disciples were doing really was work (because they were going *beyond* what God had said). Instead Jesus is concerned about verse 28. Verse 28 is the *highlight* of this short story both in terms of grammar and content. "So the Son of Man [Jesus] is lord *even of the Sabbath.*"

Now the English Standard Version of the Bible (ESV) rightly leaves "lord" lowercase, because Jesus isn't saying "I'm Yahweh God of the Sabbath" (that doesn't even make sense). He's saying, "I'm lord as in *boss* and master of the Sabbath!"

The Pharisees were making the Sabbath bigger than Jesus. They were making the Sabbath *lord* over Jesus. But they didn't *get* that Jesus was *lord* over the Sabbath! That's Jesus' main point in verse 28. He's saying, "Hey, I'm bigger than your Sabbath-god, Pharisees."

It was such a smack in the face for them to stand in the presence of the Eternal Son of God and say, "Hey, *shape* up, you're messing with the Sabbath! You're not serving the Sabbath like you ought to." They were making Jesus *small*.

The Father does not like for the Son to be diminished. God created the world for his glory; he created the world to have the entire creation brought into subjection to God in the name of Jesus Christ, to the glory of his name. Furthermore, the *main* work of the Holy Spirit is to bring glory to the Son. So to make little of Jesus, to believe in a small Jesus is to thwart the creation and redemption purposes of God.

In this passage we see **three ways to make Jesus small in our lives** and in our church. There are lots of really disgusting ways to *minimize* Jesus: sometimes *paintings* or pictures, sometimes forwarded emails that seem religious are usually belittling of the Eternal Christ, jokes, beliefs, movies, popular books about dying or heaven or spirituality, so many of these things belittle Jesus. They portray him as so much *smaller* and *less* than he really is. Yet there are at least three ways in this passage **that we belittle** Jesus in our own lives. Because God cares enough about this subject to create a universe, ordain an entire history, and redeem a people for himself, we would do well to carefully consider these three things.

- 1) We make little of Jesus Christ when we subject him to our standards.
 - a) Illustration: MercyMe song "I Can Only Imagine"
 - b) Can you *imagine*, standing there before Him, the one who has the power and authority and *role* of literally keeping the trillions of atoms in their proper place in the Universe, and saying, "Uh, hello, Jesus, LOOK! What are you doing!? Your disciples are *disobeying* our rules!" (*Doesn't that make your fists clench? It ought to if you love the glory of God.*)
 - c) What audacity and arrogance to take the Eternal Son of God and *subject him* to your earthly, finite, and sin-corrupted assessment.
 - d) Isn't it so obvious how that belittles Jesus? He is the one who speaks Truth. He is the one who has revealed truth and righteousness. As the second member of the Trinity, righteousness as a concept means, whatever God is like!
 - e) Then I look him in the face and scornfully say, "Jesus, shame on you! You are approving your disciples' actions when we don't think they're right!" I've charged the universal definition and essence of righteousness with unrighteousness.
 - f) Well it's really easy to wag our finger at the Pharisees, isn't it? And it's really easy to see ourselves as the *disciples* in this story, but maybe we should say, Is it possible that *we* sometimes, are the Pharisees? Is it possible that we sometimes *shame* Jesus for not complying with our understanding, assessments, and standards? Is it possible that we sometimes shrink Jesus down to size so we could have a pocket-size Jesus that fits our understanding and lifestyle much better?
 - i) This is particularly easy to do in our beliefs.
 - (1) There are some things in Scripture that we have difficulty hearing and believing.

- (2) A few weeks back I read you some of an interview on faith with President Obama. He said, “There's the belief, certainly in some quarters, that people [who] haven't embraced Jesus Christ as their personal savior that they're going to hell.” The interviewer asked, “You don't believe that?” Obama answered: “I find it hard to believe that my God would consign four-fifths of the world to hell. I can't imagine that my God would allow some little Hindu kid in India who never interacts with the Christian faith to somehow burn for all eternity. That's just not part of my religious makeup.”
- (3) In this case, I'm *less* concerned with what he said (although there's certainly reason for concern there), I'm *more* concerned with how he said it, how he appeals to his standard to say what God will do and what God won't do.

- ii) We do the same thing. We talk about *our* God in *our* opinion and *our* belief system and we formulate an entire understanding of God that is not rooted in his Word. What we believe about God can only be founded upon his Word. If we have these beliefs about God that have not been demonstrated to us from the Bible, where did they come from? And who is the authority behind those beliefs? Now we're going to listen to sermons and talk about God and think about life and we're doing all of that through the grid of our beliefs, but it's all based on our authority and assessment of God (as opposed to who God has revealed himself to be). That is to make Christ small. It's to subject him to our understanding instead of seeing him and his work in the light of His own revelation and authority in the Word.
- g) I see this most often when I talk to people about God's Sovereignty and his *control* over all things that take place. Or when God says that he chooses some people to bring to Eternal Life (election). And this is the *biggest* one, when God's Word talks about the roles of men and women in marriage and in the church. We say, “Well that doesn't align with my understanding.” But where did we get our understanding. If we didn't get it from the Word of God, then we're subjecting God to our authority.
- h) Isn't that doing exactly what the Pharisees did?
- i) If we are god, then Jesus must answer to us; he must comply with our standards, and he must do things the way we deem right, just, and fair. But if he is God, then who are we to answer back to God (Romans 9) and tell the standard, essence, and definition of righteousness what is right? How *small* that makes Christ.

2) We make little of Christ when we miss the ultimate *plan/role* of Jesus

- a) Look again at Jesus' answer in verses 25 + 26.
- b) *Explanation of story Jesus references*
- i) In 1 Samuel 21, David had been anointed as Israel's rightful king. Unfortunately, her former king, King Saul, was unwilling to just step down and get out of the way.
- ii) And so King Saul went on this crazy streak, trying to track David down and hunt him like a dog until he was dead!
- iii) Now David and a group of devoted men with him were official fugitives running from King Saul. They are starving and need to eat, so as they flee they come to the town where the Tabernacle was at that time.
- iv) When he pled for food, the only food the priests had to give him was the bread that had been on the altar of bread inside the Tabernacle. Only priests were allowed to eat that bread. But for some reason, the priest gives the food to David, and David eats it and gives it to his followers as well.
- c) The question is: why does Jesus cite this story in his answer to the Pharisees?

- i) There are few difficulties there:
 - (1) What David did *really was* unlawful; what Jesus did was actually Lawful even though the Pharisees said it wasn't.
 - (2) Jesus was accused of "violating the Sabbath" but there's no indication that David did this necessarily on the Sabbath (although that's a possibility).
 - (3) Also, David and his men were starving in desperate need; the same can't be said of Jesus' disciples.
- ii) So at first you say, "Okay that really doesn't make sense Jesus."
- iii) Not to mention, we can hardly except that Jesus is saying, "It's okay to ignore the Law of God if you're really in need." Surely that's not what he's saying considering he taught in Matthew 5:19 that "whoever relaxes one of the least of [the] commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called lest in the kingdom of heaven." Whatever Jesus is doing, he is not "relaxing" or teaching others to relax the commandments of God.
- iv) "So what exactly is your point Jesus?"
- v) His point is not so much *what* David did as much as it is **that it was David who did it!** That's the most important thing here. It was David who did this and who gave this to his followers. Jesus is identifying himself with *David*. He is claiming at least the same authority as David.
- vi) So the point of Jesus' answer to the Pharisees is basically: "You don't know who you're dealing with! You're talking to someone who is, in some sense, like David."
- d) Now what's the significance of David? Well, over the course of the Old Testament, the Israelites were supposed to learn several things:
 - i) One, even though sin seems to have kept God from fulfilling his purpose in having a people for himself, God will succeed and carry out his purposes.
 - ii) Two, although God's purpose is to be King himself over his people, he's also going to have a *man* as king to rule eternally over his people.
 - iii) Three, that man-king is going to be like David, is going to have a special relationship to God, is going to be *descended* from David, and is going to be king forever.
 - iv) Four, the faithful Israelites were waiting for God to raise up a descendant of David to be their blessed, eternal king.
- e) So this little story answers the Pharisees by saying, "You don't get that I'm the promised Son of David! I'm here. And so as the Messiah, I'm lord even of the Sabbath." (**Check out this same story in Matthew 12 where Jesus' answer here is nine times clearer.**)
- f) The *most significant* way that the Pharisees made Jesus little was that their arrogant questioning of Jesus failed to acknowledge the supreme, central role that this person standing in front of them was fulfilling. Jesus wasn't walking through the grain field that day as an important figure in the life of Israel. He wasn't journeying with his disciples as a good man, a great teacher, and a worker of wonders.
- g) No, the very foot-prints his sandals left in the clay of that Israelite grain-field were hallowed because he was there as the fulfillment of God's eternal purposes for the entire Universe. Because in him, God's creation purpose was being fulfilled as he redeemed a people for God. In him, God's purpose was being fulfilled in that this people of God had now received her King, her blessed king whose throne would last for eternity, who was descended from the great King David, but also, who was himself *the Eternal God in the flesh!*
- h) The whole world, all of history, it's all been about him. That's why God made the universe and that's what God's been doing. How belittling for those Pharisees to speak to Jesus as if

he wasn't the Sustainer of the Universe, as if *he* hadn't given them life and breath and everything, as if *he* wasn't the reason their lives existed in the first place, as if *he* wasn't the purpose and object of their obedience and service and religion.

- i) Do not so dishonor Christ. Do not dare paint a small, cute little picture of a crutch of a Savior. Enough wimpy Christianity with silly emails and songs and bumper-stickers about Jesus.
 - j) This is not a fluffy little wimp we're talking about. The sight of this glorified Savior knocked the wind of out John and made him fall to his knees as if dying. That's the vastness and the glory of this Savior!
 - k) You cannot speak *too highly* of him! You cannot honor him *too much*. You cannot sanctify and bless his holy name *too much*.
 - l) Let's be so leery of speaking about Jesus, singing about Jesus, joking about Jesus in way that says, "Jesus is a cool dude!" Or "Jesus is my homeboy." Or "Jesus is helpful to have around." Or "Jesus is an important part of my life." Let's try to speak about him, think about him, and reverence him as bigger, better, and more supreme than life itself.
- 3) We make little of Christ when we make an issue more important than the person of Jesus.
- a) There's kind of a trend today to move away from calling Christianity a religion. Religion is a system of rules, laws, customs, habits, practices, and beliefs.
 - b) But at the heart of Christianity is not a system of rules, beliefs, or practices; at the heart of Christianity is a person!
 - c) "The Son of Man is *lord* even of the Sabbath!" Even over this important issue, the most important rule, the *person* of Jesus is always bigger and more central.
 - d) It's really sad when the person of Jesus takes backseat to issues in the church.
 - i) How is it that so many in American think that Christianity is about raising your kids in the church? Or how is it that half the members of the church in Cole County think that coming to church makes you a Christian? Where did that come from?
 - ii) **It came from preaching and teaching about behavior, morality, not drinking , not gambling, and premarital sex and not talk about the person of Jesus!**
 - iii) Who cares *when* you have sex if there is no Christ? Apart from the *person*, who says you can't have sex before your married? The church? It is *vital* that everything we do and teach and practice *flow out of* the person of Jesus. He must be at the center of who we are and what we do, or else everything loses its meaning.
 - iv) Church and Bible reading have no meaning if there is not a personal God and Redeemer behind them all.
 - (1) That's what verse 27 is really getting at.
 - (2) That's what Jesus is suggesting when he teaches the Pharisees, "Man is not for the Sabbath; it's the other way around."
 - (3) Christ is hinting at the purpose for the entire Law of God. The Law is *not* God; the Law was given to man so they could understand how to live for God and strive to please Him.
 - (4) What a mockery when we take the thing God gave us to help us understand what pleases him and turn those things (law/rules) into our god.
 - (5) That's what we do when we divorce keeping rules and doing the right thing from *pleasing Christ!* That is dishonoring to him because it's lifting obedience above the one we're trying to obey.

- e) Just survey your life now. *Why* do you have the principles that you do? *Why* don't you participate in those jokes at work? *Why* don't you watch those dirty television shows or movies? *Why* do you insist on being in church on Sundays? *Why* are you persistent about praying before you eat and your children not using foul language?
- f) It better be because you long to please Jesus, because Jesus is so worthy of your allegiance and holiness and these are some of the ways that you long to please him and express his worthiness.
- g) If Jesus Christ doesn't factor into your answer, then you're not serving him, you're serving a set of rules.

- h) Jesus is not a system; he's a person. Right now, exalted and glorified in heaven, he is a person. A person who happens to be the sum total of purpose and meaning in the Universe who is worthy to receive all glory, honor, dominion, and praise forever and ever.
- i) He didn't purchase us with his own blood so we could be wed to a system of thinking and rules; he purchased us at the cost of his life and by suffering the Father's wrath in order to wed us to himself in service and love.
- j) So of course, there are important things to talk about, like not being inebriated or given to excess, about abortion and premarital sex, but not apart from Christ, not apart from a real person.
- k) Everything we do and everything we choose not to do ought to be driven by a passion to please our Bridegroom! Or else, how *small* and *unworthy* we make him.

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