

Christ like Ministry
Mark 3

Ephesians 4:25-32

Colossians 3:1-11

Congregation Psalm 2:1-6

We are starting out in chapter 3 this morning, which as you will notice follows the same flow as what we have seen earlier. Starting with the first account recorded in chapter 1 we see Jesus casting out the unclean spirit on the Sabbath and it is interesting that in that account or the casting out of the unclean spirit on the Sabbath in the synagogue he was not met with opposition. In fact, the people were amazed and astonished asking What new doctrine is this? For with authority he commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him. Then he goes to Peters house, and heals Peter's mother in law, continues to heal all those who come to the house that evening, with out any mention of opposition.

Then we see in Chapter 2 the healing of the paralytic, which is starting to bring the ire of the religious elite. This week I was thinking on this, why there might be such a shift from amazement to now disgust and anger? 1st off what we see here in this account in chapter 2 is Jesus claim to forgive sins. This brings anger to the scribes who were present for they reasoned among themselves why does this man speak blasphemies, it is only God who can forgive sins. They did not except Jesus as the promised Messiah, and quickly he went from being someone who was amusing, to someone who was threatening. He was claiming to be the Son of God, he was claiming to be the Messiah sent from God.

Another reason I think why they started to turn against him is because he stood to threaten their power and control over the people. A few weeks ago we talked a bit about the Pharisee's and the hold that they had over the people of Israel. While they only made up about 1% of the population they were seen as being the most devout and most holy of them. The Scribes, the Pharisee's were the ones who laid out, enforced, and judged what was and what was not permissible on the sabbath. And here comes one, who is claiming to be the Messiah, if it is true then all of their power, prestige and influence would be threatened. So it is easy to see why they would target Jesus and try to challenge him and trip him up in their questioning and accusations. So already even this early in Jesus ministry they have started a campaign against him marking him as a blasphemer, a sabbath breaker, and an apostate from religious customs, seeking to discredit his claims, protect their own interests and attempt to drive the public opinion to turn against him.

But as we have seen time and time again, Jesus already knows what they are reasoning in their hearts before it is even spoken, and he silences them and shows them the hypocrisy in their own beliefs and practices. Ever time they try to discredit him, to make a show before the crowds of people that this man Jesus is a fake, a false prophet it always backfires against them, and what we see here here in chapter 3 is going to be no different. So let us start this morning by reading chapter 3:1-7

So we find Jesus again, in the synagogue on the Sabbath and there is a man there with a withered arm. Verse 2 says that there were those there watching him closely, they were hanging in suspense to see if he would heal this man on the Sabbath as he has already before. They were waiting to accuse him, the irony of this is that they were waiting to accuse Jesus of doing good on the Sabbath while they themselves were plotting and planning evil on the Sabbath. As we talked about a few weeks ago keeping the Sabbath was of the upmost importance to the Jewish leaders. It was seen as one of the God given ordinances that set them apart from everyone else. Over the years the religious leaders kept adding more and more requirements putting a heavier burden on the people. The only circumstance that

it was acceptable to break the sabbath was if it was an endangerment to life. First aid was permissible to prevent a wound from worsening but to seek or work toward a cure during the sabbath was forbidden for that was seen as doing work on the sabbath.

A withered hand is obviously not a life threatening problem, for this man had probably lived with it from birth, the healing of his hand would be seen as breaking the sabbath rules, for it was unlawful to even set a broken limb until the sabbath was over. But we see in verse 3, that Jesus disregards this and asks the man to step forward. Verse 3” And he said to the man who had the withered hand, Step forward. Then he said to them, Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill? But they kept silent. This healing of the withered hand is different then the previous healings we have read about up to this point. In all of the previously recorded accounts Jesus was approached by the afflicted, they sought after him, they pressed and crowded to get to him. But here was man in the crowd, blending in, and Jesus calls to him, Step forward for all to see. This type of attention usually is something that people who are disabilities seek to avoid, they do not want to be a public spectacle.

Jesus knows those in the crowd who are seeking to catch him in breaking the sabbath, who are seeking to discredit his claims for the Messiah would never break God's law. But Jesus, knowing full well their thoughts, and intentions, and all of their added rules and regulations that they have tied to the law and traditions perverting its purpose and meaning. Taking the shadow, the thing that is to point to the Messiah, and instead making it the substance and driving force behind their belief system. So he calls forth this man, to teach the true intention of God's law, the true purpose and to expose and point out the perversions and wrong thinking of these religious elite. So he asks, 2 questions, first he asks, is it lawful to do good, or to do evil on the sabbath.

To Jesus the human need sets forth a moral imperative. If there are opportunities to preform good deeds there is no neutral ground, and failure to do good is to contribute to evil. Therefore it is not only permissible for Jesus to heal on the Sabbath, but it is the right and good thing to do even if it is unlawful according to their traditions. As Jesus said in chapter 2:27, He said to them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is the Lord of the sabbath, and if Jesus is Lord of the sabbath, then he has the authority, and right to determine what is, and is not permissible. Notice that Mark says at the end of verse 4, “But they kept silent.”

Jesus caught them in a conundrum, He sets forth a test of true verse false religion by measuring its response to injustice. In verse 5, we see Jesus response to their silence, to their willingness to allow for the injustice of not allowing the healing of this man's withered hand. Verse 5. “ And when he looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts, He said tot he man, Stretch out your hand, and he stretched it out and his hand was restored as whole as the other.” In the face of this mans need, the religious authorities remain silent, and this silence of these religious authorities is evident that for them religion is more about fulfilling some set rules and regulations. When your religion is set up in this way, it becomes easy to to separate yourself from others, it feeds your own pride and arrogance and protects you from having to get your hands dirty caring for those who are in need.

This creates an outward appearance of holiness, and the measure of holiness and pure religion becomes that which can be tested and measured, the focus becomes all about correctly following a list of rules and regulations, having an appearance of purity but often times completely ignores the evil intent and sin that runs rampant in the hearts and minds of these who outwardly appear to be religious.

As James Edwards put it, “The test of all theology and morality is either passed or failed by one's response to the weakest and most defenseless members of society. For Jesus the call of God presents itself urgently in the need of this particular man.” Is it lawful to do good, or to do Evil on the Sabbath?

The 2nd part of Jesus question is pointed directly to those who are standing to accuse him of breaking the Sabbath law. He asks, is it lawful on the Sabbath to save life, or to kill? This question isn't about healing the man's withered hand, for such affliction is not a life or death situation so he must have posed this question for another reason. Which I think is to point to the fact that these who saw themselves as pious, holy, religious followers of God who would not dare even think of doing something as blasphemous as healing this man are in fact sitting there with murder in their hearts. What is more lawful on the Sabbath, to do good? Or to plot evil? No matter how they try to discredit Jesus, to catch him breaking the laws, he is always way ahead of them and in this case it appears manufactured this situation by calling forward the man with the wither hand to show the stark difference between what these Pharisee's were saying what was required for holiness, and what God says is the true requirements of holiness.

We see Jesus here setting forth this example, that even in the face of opposition, caring little for the opinions of his peers, or the consequence of his action he tells his man to Stretch out his hand. He does what is right, he does what is good with little regard to the opinions of those around him. How often do we stay silent when we should come to the defense of someone who needs it? How often do we turn and look the other way avoiding and ignoring those in our lives who may need help? Humanly speaking, Jesus had every reason to remain silent, to not draw attention to himself, to avoid ridicule, and opposition, and death. But that was not why he had come, and we can already see how his ministry is driving forward to the Cross.

What we have seen so far in Jesus ministry is nothing but grace, love and self sacrificing. Always being surrounded by people who want to hear what he has to say, who want to witness a miracle, and then there are those who come to be healed. And in the middle of all of this was the Pharisee's who were plotting against him. They saw him as a threat, for he challenged their religious authority and understanding of the scriptures. It says here that Jesus became angry with them because of the hardness of their hearts. Up until this point the religious leaders would criticize Jesus and his disciples, for his claim to having the authority to forgive sins, for dining with sinners and tax collectors and for his disciples plucking grain as they walked through the fields on the sabbath. But now we see that their criticism has turned to plotting.

Initially I think they were trying to discredit Jesus, they were trying to make him out to look like a false prophet and turn public opinion against him. But everywhere he went it seems his popularity grew, people being healed, unclean spirits being cast out, and people claiming faith in him. The Pharisee's had failed in their attempt to sully his name, to paint him as a heretic in the public eye. So what we are seeing here in verse 6. is the next step in attempting to deal with this Jesus problem. If they couldn't turn the people against him then they needed to get rid of him. After Jesus healed the man with the withered hand Mark says, that “ then the Pharisee's went out and immediately plotted with the Herodians against Him how they might destroy him.”

It is interesting Marks mention of the Herodians here because the accounts in Matthew and Luke do not mention them, and they only appear in 3 other passages in the new testament. Little is known about this group, or who this group truly is but it is widely believed that they were not another sect in the Jewish Faith like the Pharisee's and Saducess, but instead a group of people who remained

loyal to Herod. Josephus notes that Herod showed great favor to those of the city's populace who had been on his side while he was still a commoner. This alludes to the fact of how desperate that the Pharisee's must have been to eliminate Jesus.

That they would plot and have dealings with a group of people aligned to the Roman empire. Remember when they were criticizing Jesus for eating with Tax collectors? One of the main issues they took with his association with the Tax collectors was their ties to the Roman government. Israelite who worked as tax collectors were cast out of the temple, were shunned by religious Jews as being apostates aligning themselves with the gentiles. So I find it really interesting that these Pharisee's would be aligning themselves with others who were loyal to the Roman Empire. That really just serves to show their desperation.

So this opposition of Jesus was not just one of religion but also was tied into the politics of Israel. The herodians obviously had no love for him and also saw him as a threat that needed to be removed. If he truly was the promised king, then that might threaten Roman rule and Israel might once again become a sovereign nation. But as we know that was not Jesus' purpose, he did not come to save Israel from their oppressors, to free them from the Gentile Government who ruled over them, but rather to establish spiritual Israel, and offer salvation to all those who are of the faith of Abraham. The true children and heirs to the promises given to Abraham.

The pharisee's and herodians hatred toward Jesus was so strong that they could not even see the good that he was doing. These 2 groups that would normally be at odds with each other plotted together to eliminate a common enemy. We see this in the political realm today, churches who are willing to align themselves with secular organizations for political gain and power. Locking arm and arm against a common goal, compromising, and often setting aside the core foundations of their faith to accomplish a political goal. But this doesn't happen just in the political realm either, it happens in the spiritual realm as well. Just like the Pharisee's who saw themselves as the authority, who believed that they had everything right, we too can be that way against other brothers and sisters in the faith if we are not careful.

Diana was reading this week a blog post by a man who was claiming that those who reject the sovereign grace understanding of the gospel and instead adhere to the free will understanding of the gospel are all heretics and a synagogue of Satan. Is this not the same type of hardening of the heart that we see here with the Pharisee's? Is this not the very thing that they were doing? They thought themselves so pious, so righteous, that when the promised messiah came, and he was not what they thought he would be they hardened their hearts and rejected him. It can be so easy to fall into this very same trap is it not? sometimes we can spend so much time and effort defending our own views, or combating against those we see are holding what wrong understandings of scripture, that if we are not careful we end up becoming like the Pharisee's, turning our brothers and sisters into enemies.

Just like how the Pharisees progressed from criticism to plotting against Jesus, if we are not careful our thoughts of opposition to the beliefs of our brothers and sisters can result in a hardness of our hearts toward them. This is a difficult balance to strike, to both be faithful to right teaching of scripture, and graceful and compassionate to those who may not be exactly on the same page as you are. I think that we see an example of this very thing in Jesus and his ministry here.

Notice as he is dealing with the people who he is interacting with, he has little concern over their belief, whether they are religious devout Jews, or gentile colluding tax collectors. He talks to, ministers to, and heals those who come to him. Yet, when it comes to the religious leaders, and

teachers, those who are in authority he does not cut them any slack. For it is they who have lead the people astray.

It is they who have taken what God has given and added to it, twisting it, and putting an oppressive burden upon the people. It is they who in their pride and arrogance and appearance of religious piety have hardened their hearts against the Messiah. Jesus does not let them get away with it, and holds them accountable. These are not laymen, these are not ignorant people, but they are the ones who are educated, the ones who are the religious authority over the teaching and understanding of the scriptures. They are ones who have no excuse, for they should know better.

It is the same with those who today teach false doctrine, false gospels. They are people who are claiming authority, they are teaching and preaching and are responsible for all those that they lead astray just like the Pharisee's of Jesus day. We should oppose them, we should fight against their false teaching, and be calling them out on it. For we are not fighting for the sake of fighting, or necessarily even fighting to prove we are right, but we are fighting for the souls of those who are deceived under their teaching. But with those who have been lead astray, who have been following false teaching we need to be compassionate and gracious toward. We need to be sure that we are following the example of our Savior in his ministry, and not become hard hearted in our doctrinal defense as the Pharisee's.

We are called to love our neighbors as ourselves after all, to put those in need before ourselves. To not be a stumbling block to a weaker brother, someone who may have been under the teaching of false doctrines, or whose spiritual growth may have been stunted by the teaching they have been under. It is important to remember our own weakness, and our own need for forgiveness so that we do not become full of pride and arrogance like the pharisee's. Let us strive to ever be more like our savior, growing in grace and faith, persevering with patience and love. Not letting the opposition of the world, or even others in the faith to deter us from our ministry, but in all things put on Christ

As Paul wrote to the Colossians, "For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. That you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, for all patience and long suffering with joy, giving thanks to the father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He had delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the son of his love, in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created that in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones, or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through him and for him, and he is before all things and in him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead that in all things he may have the preeminence."

Christ is all, Christ is center, and we must remember this as we minister and witness and instruct those we have contact with.

