



Mark 2:1-28 - “Outrage and Opposition” - January 31, 2021

OPEN

What makes you outraged? Unsafe drivers? Poor goaltending? Hair in your soup? These I would characterize as **mundane outrage** – frustrations and irritations that upset us. However, there is also **moral outrage** in which a person is angry because a moral violation has occurred. Interestingly, Jesus modeled an anger at the abuses that were occurring in the Temple – the story is found in John 2:13-17. There is a place for moral outrage at injustices in our world today – sex trafficking, racism, economic exploitation – the list is long! But some moral outrage is...outrageous!

Elizabeth Nolan Brown has written an article – [Moral Outrage Is Self-Serving, Say Psychologists](#) – which argues that moral outrage can actually serve as a smokescreen for personal guilt. Citing a 2017 study by Zachary Rothschild and Lucas A. Keefer, Brown writes, “*These findings suggest that feelings of moral outrage, long thought to be grounded solely in concerns with maintaining justice, may sometimes reflect efforts to maintain a moral identity.*”

Today we are examining outrage on the part of those who should have embraced Jesus but opposed Him fiercely. In Mark 3:6 we learn that this grew into an assassination plot! In the weeks leading to Easter, we are walking with Jesus through the book of Mark. Though it is a compact Gospel, it is packed with truth about Jesus’ compelling invitation. So far in our series, “**Follow Me: The Call of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark**” we have seen the **preparation** (1:1-8) and **launch** (1:9-20) of Jesus’ earthly ministry. Last week we examined **pseudo-followers** of Jesus (1:21-45).

DIG

In **Mark 2:1-27** we encounter outrage and opposition to Jesus. Who were outraged? These were the “teachers of the Law” (see 1:22; literally, “the scribes”, 2:6) or “Pharisees” (2:16,24). When they encountered the mission of Jesus they responded, “this is just the sort of thing up with which we will not put (Winston Churchill)!

When Jesus stretched the muscles of His divine power the Pharisees got upset. Why? Was it because He was driving back the forces of evil? No! They did not object to that. What outraged the Pharisees was the fact that Jesus challenged their self-centered, self-sufficient, self-righteous lives!

In our passage Mark selected four situations which exposed the moral bankruptcy of those who were responsible to lead God’s people. Because we are covering an entire chapter we will focus on four key verses.

[1] Opposed to the authority of Jesus - 2:1-12

The first scene described involved a paralyzed man who was brought to Jesus in a unique way – through the roof! What was Jesus response? He said, “*Son, your sins are forgiven.*” (v. 5) which enraged the Pharisees, internally. They believed Jesus was blaspheming – only God can forgive – and they did not recognize Jesus as the Son of God! (vv.6-7) Understanding this in His spirit, Jesus challenged their anger and opposition. **Key Verse: v.10** – Why had Jesus offered forgiveness? It was “*in order that [they] may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.*”

Pharisees were a self-righteous, separated sect within 1st Century Judaism. They were passionate about both the written and the oral Law of God. However, they had very little spiritual authority (see 1:22). Unsurprisingly, they were “morally outraged” at Jesus. But this covered their lack of humility and compassion. Paul Tripp says, “*Self-righteous people tend not to be patient and understanding in the face of the failure of others. This goes back to the reality that no one give grace better than a person who knows he desperately needs it himself.*” (**Dangerous Calling**, Crossway, 2012, 74)

[2] Opposed to the association of Jesus - 2:13-17

The second scene took place when Jesus called Levi/Matthew (vv.13-14). When Jesus attended a dinner at the home of Levi he came into contact with “tax collectors and sinners”. Predictably the Pharisees were outraged that Jesus would associate with people who collaborated with Rome and disobeyed the Law. **Key Verse: v.17** – Jesus answer was direct: “*I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.*”

Once again, the “moral outrage” of the Pharisees is tragic. Their reputation was not to rescue and restore sinners – but to condemn. However, “*God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.*” (John 3:17) The angry resistance of the Pharisees blinded them to Jesus mission of redemption. John Fischer, who has written **12 Steps for the Recovering Pharisee...Like Me** (Bethany House, 2000) describes step 3 this way: “*Realize that we detest mercy being given to those who, unlike us, haven’t worked for it and don’t deserve it.*”

[3] Opposed to the apathy of Jesus - 2:18-22

The third scene involved the practice of fasting. And the outrage, at least the question, came from the crowd. Why, they wondered, would the followers of John the Baptizer and the Pharisees fast, but not the followers of Jesus!? There was frustration that this was a matter about which Jesus appeared apathetic. Do you notice how some people become all twisted up about things that frankly, Jesus appears apathetic about?

Fasting for the Pharisees was part of their performance-based piety. Tragically, self-righteousness creates distance from God! **Key Verse: v.19** – What was Jesus' response? He explained, "*while the bridegroom is with them the attendants of the bridegroom do not fast.*" Jesus does not call followers to perform old rituals, but to enter a new relationship with Himself.

[4] Opposed to the activity of Jesus - 2:23-28

The fourth scene centered around keeping the Sabbath. This concerned the way the disciples "reaped grain." (v.23) To the outrage of the Pharisees Jesus answered with the story of David, who served consecrated bread to his men (see I Samuel 21:1-6). **Key Verse: v.27** – "*The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.*" The Pharisees had developed an oral tradition alongside God's Law that was hindering spiritual health. Even today, Hassidic Jews in Manhattan depend upon a device called an eruv. This is a wire which is circles the city on poles. Why? It extends the boundary of the home so that physical tasks can be done on the Sabbath outside one's house – [read more](#).

But Jesus make it clear that the Sabbath, as with all of God's Law is to lead His followers into deeper spiritual life and vitality. In Mark 3:1-5 the Pharisees were equally outraged that Jesus would heal someone on the Sabbath! Notice Jesus' challenge in verse 4. He seems to infer that His ministry was life-giving while the Pharisees were spiritually "killing" the people!

REFLECT

What a dilemma. Some call it Pharisee-ism. Other labels are legalism or conservatism. I am partial to the description, performance-based religion. Whatever it is called, left unchecked it will choke out spiritual life. This is the life self, cloaked in spirituality. It is a danger not far from any follower of Jesus.

Remember what Jesus said in Mark 8:34 – "*If anyone would come after me he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.*" This is the come-follow-Me, Good News invitation from Jesus.

Check out all twelve steps that John Fischer has developed in his book **12 Steps for the Recovering Pharisee...Like Me**. Consider how these are truths which help us seek true spiritual life, not the performance of self.

- Step 1* We admit that our single most unmitigated pleasure is to judge other people
- Step 2* Have come to believe that our means of obtaining greatness is to make everyone lower than ourselves in our own mind
- Step 3* Realize that we detest mercy being given to those who, unlike us, haven't worked for it and don't deserve it
- Step 4* Have decided that we don't want to get what we deserve after all, and we don't want anyone else to either
- Step 5* Will cease all attempts to apply teaching and rebuke to anyone but ourselves
- Step 6* Are ready to have God remove all these defects of attitude and character
- Step 7* Embrace the belief that we are, and will always be, experts at sinning
- Step 8* Are looking closely at the lives of famous men and women of the Bible who turned out to be ordinary sinners like us
- Step 9* Are seeking through prayer and meditation to make a conscious effort to consider others better than ourselves
- Step 10* Embrace the state of astonishment as a permanent and glorious reality
- Step 11* Choose to rid ourselves of any attitude that is not bathed in gratitude
- Step 12* Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we will try to carry this message to others who think that Christians are better than everyone else

Pharisee-ism creeps so easily into pastoral ministry, argues Paul Tripp, in his boo, **Dangerous Calling**. Consider how his comments can apply to all followers of Jesus.

Could it be that many of the stresses of ministry are the result of our seeking to get things out of ministry that it will never deliver? Could it be that we're asking ministry to do for us what only the Messiah can do? Could it be that in our ministries we're seeking horizontally what we've already been given in Christ? You see, the biggest protection against the kingdom of self is not a se to self-reformative defensive strategies. It's a heart that is so blown away by the right-here, right-now glories of the grace of Jesus Christ that we're not easily seduced by the lesser temporary glories of that claustrophobic kingdom of one, the kingdom of self. (102)