

95-01-15Mark

It is alive and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of the soul and the spirit and the joints and the marrow. It is a critic of the thoughts and intents of the heart. What does that tell us about the Word of God? It's something that shakes us up, it cuts us apart, it strikes through the very heart of things, doesn't it? As we pray and prepare ourselves for the study of God's Word this morning, let's ask God's blessing on our study, let's ask that God the Holy Spirit will make these things real to us so that we will be transformed.

Let us pray. Father, what a privilege it is to assemble with other believers and to enjoy fellowship with them and with You. We thank You for the blessings that You have bestowed on us.

We thank You for Your faithfulness. We thank You for Your glory and the fact that You've given us the opportunity to reflect Your glory in our lives. We pray now as we look into the truth of Your Word that God the Holy Spirit will make it real to us, help us to understand it.

We pray that it will pierce us and lay us open and bring to light those hidden motives and those hidden thoughts and intents so that we can be changed and we can be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ and reflect His glory. For we ask it in Jesus' name, Amen. We've been studying the Gospel of Mark and we're at a point in the book where a transition is going to take place.

And to help us see where we are and where we're going, I'm going to ask you to do another sort of unusual thing today. If you look on your bulletin, on the back there's this great pristine area with no ink on it that says, Notes. You're going to need that this morning.

I thought I was tempted to set up the overhead projector and test that out. I wasn't physically able to do that without masking off the choir. So you're going to need to use this piece of paper this morning to keep track of where we are.

So this will be a challenge. A little extra use of your bulletin and a pen this morning. There is a structure, and I've mentioned this in some of our previous lessons, and I need to show you this structure this morning.

Some of the seminary professors would say, Oh Sam, you're treading into deep waters here. You're going to confuse and dismay and confound. But I have faith in you.

I have confidence that I can get this across and you can catch it and write it down on this piece of paper. So we'll see how it goes. There is a thing called a chiasm.

And chi is one of the letters in the Greek alphabet. You may have heard, you know, the sweetheart of Sigma Chi or wasn't that a song way back when? Chi is a Greek letter. And it's an X. It's a great big X. So when we talk about a chiasm or a chi-ism, what it talks about is that we

have something that sort of goes like this.

And when we look at it, the outermost things sort of correspond, they match. And then you come down one level and up one level and these things kind of match. You come in one level and in one level and these things kind of match.

And right at the center, it's like if you took your bow tie sideways, right there in the center where the knot is, that's the big main idea. That's where all of the emphasis is. Now this chiasm is something that Greeks were very familiar with.

You must remember that back in ancient days, people didn't have a lot of books and manuscripts for the common people. Things were communicated verbally. Stories were told by wandering tale-tellers.

And so they had to find a way to make things stick in people's minds because they couldn't just say, now let me flip back to that previous page and remember what you said. So they would use these structures and use these memory devices. You know that some of the Psalms, each of the little paragraphs starts with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

Psalms 119 is the longest. Each section starts with a different letter, Aleph, Beth, Gimel, Dalet, He. And each line in those paragraphs in Hebrew starts with that letter.

It was a memory device. That tells you that the content of Psalm 119 is something that God hopes we will memorize and remember and be able to draw on. This is what we have in the Gospel of Mark.

This section that we have covered, we have now covered what? Chapter 1, Chapter 2, and we're just now getting into Chapter 3. And this initial portion forms one of these chiasms. And I want to show that to you this morning. So on your piece of paper here, you're going to need to leave room because we're going to have seven lines.

There's going to be seven items. And each of the first four, I want you to indent just a little bit so that when we come back out, you'll be able to see this chiasm. So write the first one pretty close to your left-hand margin.

And then leave a little bit of room. And we'll put the next one and the next one. And then you'll have the center one.

You can write it just about in the middle of the page. And then when I give you number five, it'll start coming back out. And number six and number seven will be back over here at the left.

Okay? That's the hardest part of the whole deal this morning. If you got that, we're in good shape. Mark Chapters 1 and 2. Now we had an introduction, and that was the ministry of John the Baptist.

And the baptism of Jesus Christ by John the Baptist. We've gone over that in detail. And we understand that the great new thing that happened in Jesus' day, the great new thing that happened when John the Baptist came on the scene, is that after hundreds of years of going along the same way, some new teaching came in.

A new authority, a new voice crying in the wilderness. A new message. Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

And John was out there performing a ritual. Now this ritual idea is very important, because we just got through mentioning that the Word of God is supposed to get in and shake us up a little bit. It's supposed to make us remember that God is real.

God is alive. We can't get trapped in an old wineskin. We can't be caught wearing old garments.

We have to let God's Word get inside us and change us. Now the Israelites had had several hundred years of the same thing. The same scribes.

The same Pharisees. This great barnacle of tradition that had grown on the hull of the ship there and had slowed it down almost to a stop. They had defined and redefined and codified and verified and rulefied and written down and looked at one another and condemned, interpreting the law.

And the law was no longer what God had written it to be. It wasn't a way to express life that was inside somebody's soul. It had become an external, superficial way to exhibit self-righteousness and to try to impress other people.

The life of God had gone out of it. It had become a shell with no life in the middle. Jesus came and started teaching the truth of the Word of God.

He was the greatest teacher that has ever walked the planet. He had the greatest introduction that anyone has ever had in the person of John the Baptist. John brought a message to Israel.

He said, look, I'm going to do this ritual in the wilderness. I'm going to baptize you with water. But there's somebody coming after me that's going to blow this away.

He's not going to baptize you with water. He's not going to be engaged in ritual. He's going to bring the Holy Spirit.

He's going to bring fire. There's going to be life. There's going to be change.

There's going to be dynamics like you haven't seen since the days of the prophets. That was the mission of John the Baptist to wake people up and say, get ready, the Son of God is coming, the Lamb of God is coming. His ministry as a ritual summed up the whole Old Testament.

He said, look, I'm dunking you in water. This isn't changing you. This external ritual, all Jerusalem and Judea came out and got dunked in the Jordan.

That didn't wreak havoc in their soul. That didn't change them. When they came up out of the water, if you go to the Gospel of John, they came up out of the water and they said, okay, John, we've been baptized, now what? Well, didn't the baptism teach you something? Didn't it change you? Didn't it plant some fire inside you to tell you what to do? No, they said, well, now what should we do? He said, well, bear fruit in keeping with repentance.

The idea is not the dunking, it's a change of mind. We're here to be changed, to have our minds changed, to have our thinking changed, to reflect the glory of God. Jesus came, and what was His message? The very same as John's.

Repent. Change your mind. The kingdom of God is upon you.

The kingdom of God is here. But this ritual, it was like a mummy case. It was like one of these big boxes that had just enclosed Israel, and inside it was nothing but death.

And it was a very difficult transition that people had to make to break free of that tradition, to break free of what had been done by their parents and their grandparents and their great-grandparents going back for hundreds of years. The only thing that can free us and restore the life and the vitality that God wants us to have is His Word. And that's why the emphasis in Jesus' ministry was teaching.

He shook the people up. He cast out demons and He healed. But we see that His purpose was to teach.

He said, let me get your attention and then let me teach you. Let me put that life, that living, abiding Word of God in you and restore you to the life that God has intended for you all along. So, if you look back in Mark 1, after the introduction, and after this little paragraph in verses 16-20 where He calls out His disciples, our chiasm here, our structure that Mark wants us to notice, really begins in verse 21 of chapter 1 when they go into Capernaum and immediately on the Sabbath, He entered the synagogue.

Now, this is going to be the first line I would like you to write down here. The first line, all the way over to the left, put down, Synagogue on the Sabbath. Synagogue on the Sabbath.

This is where Jesus' ministry in Mark really begins. And Mark has a purpose in this. John said Jesus did so many things that all the books in the world couldn't fill it.

So, each of the Gospel writers selected certain things to construct their account under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to teach us something. This is the first one that Mark selects. Synagogue on the Sabbath.

And what did He do there? We remember that there was a demon-possessed man. He cast out the demon. Later that same day, He healed the fever of Peter's mother-in-law.

All in the same day, on the Sabbath. He started out in the synagogue. Synagogue on the Sabbath.

Now, after that, early the next morning, He was out praying and Peter said, you've attracted a huge crowd. Come on in and minister to them. And He said, no, we're going to leave.

We're going to go elsewhere. I have other people to teach. He said, for this purpose I have come forth that I may preach.

Not that I may heal. I'm glad there's a big crowd. I'm sure there are more people that are lame and sick and palsy than demon-possessed.

But I've got to go elsewhere and preach. That's why I came. I came to communicate.

So then, He is preaching in the synagogues throughout all Galilee and casting out demons. And then the next episode, this is going to be our second line and we're going to indent it just a little bit underneath here. The second line is the incident of the leper.

And you can just put down leper there. You recall that the leper came and he said, I know that if you will, you can make me clean. Jesus said, I will.

Be clean. And then He charged him strictly and He said, I want you to go and perform the ritual sacrifice that Moses commanded. And out there by the word leper, you can just put the word ritual.

Because the emphasis in that healing, Jesus healed many lepers. He healed many blind people. But He charged this leper.

He said, I want you to go. And it's the strongest word in Greek for giving someone an order. It implies that He slammed him up against the wall and got right up in his face and said, Now look, I'm not fooling around here.

Go to the temple and offer the sacrifice that Moses commanded as a testimony. That ritual is a testimony. People are going to learn something when you go in and perform that ritual.

Well, instead, the leper disobeyed. He went out and began to proclaim. Jesus said, don't tell anybody.

Just go do the ritual. That's the testimony I want you to have. But the leper got excited.

I've been cleansed. I'm healed. I'm back in fellowship with the rest of the nation.

I can go anywhere I want. I don't have to cover my face and cry unclean, unclean. He got so excited, he went out and disobeyed.

He did not perform the ritual. He went out and gave his personal testimony of the great thing that Jesus had done for him. That sounds like a wonderful thing.

You say, now how could anybody fault someone for giving their personal testimony? Well, Jesus did. Jesus said, don't do that. That's not your mission.

That's not your specific calling. I want you to perform this ritual. He did not do it.

Now, the third element that we have recorded by Mark in the ministry of Jesus comes after that. And that's the episode where he's in the room teaching and he's surrounded by people and they bring the paralytic. They bring the man on the mat that's paralyzed.

And they dig a hole in the roof and they let him down. And Jesus heals him. So, indented again as your third line, you can put the paralytic.

Or if you can't spell paralytic, just put a big P there for paralyzed. The man that was let down through the roof. What was the issue there? What did Jesus focus on in that episode? He said, so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority to forgive sin.

Jesus has authority to forgive sin. Why did He heal that man? He said, in order that you may know that I, the Son of Man, have authority on this earth to forgive sins, I said to the man, take up your bed and walk. And the man did.

Jesus was trying to emphasize, to demonstrate His authority on earth. In this case, authority to forgive sin. So out there next to paralytic, you can put authority over sin.

Authority to forgive. The next episode we have, we have the calling of Levi as a disciple. He's walking by the tax collector's booth and he says, follow me.

And Levi does. And the next scene that we see, the next view that we have is Jesus sitting in Levi's house eating with the tax collectors and sinners. And this is going to be our innermost line here.

This is going to be our fourth line. You can start at about the middle of the page and you can just say, eating with sinners. Eating with sinners.

Of course, He was accused by the religious leaders. This is where we start to see the religious crowd come forward. The Pharisees and the scribes and they say, how can you do this? How can you associate with these social outcasts? We've identified these people.

They are sinners. We're the righteous people. If you really were the Messiah, you'd be coming to

us.

We're the followers of God. We're the keepers of the flame. We're the ones that wrote down all these rules to protect the law.

And Jesus says two things there. He says, those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. And He says, I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

Now that is going to be right at the center of our little structure here. And that's the point. The point of chapter 1 and chapter 2 all the way through to chapter 3, verse 6 is contained right in that central saying of Jesus Christ.

And we'll come back to that in just a moment. Now right after that, starting in 2.23, He and His disciples are going through the grain fields and the disciples pull off some heads of wheat and eat them. And now they're accused of... I'm sorry, I've skipped one.

The Pharisees and the disciples of John are fasting, aren't they? Right after this feast with the sinners. They say, your disciples don't fast. Even John's disciples fast.

You're not fasting. So if you want to start coming back out now on your outline, your fifth line there, you can just put, not fasting. Jesus and His disciples are accused of not fasting.

Not fasting. Not conforming to the standard practice. And we went back in the Old Testament and saw that there was no biblical requirement to fast.

Nowhere in the Old Testament did God command the people of Israel to fast. They had the opportunity once on the Day of Atonement to afflict themselves, and if they decided to include fasting as a part of their self-affliction, that would be legitimate. But there is no command to fast in the Old Testament.

The Pharisees, by the time of Jesus Christ, had instituted so many fasts that there were two fasts a week. It was prescribed that they fast on Monday and fast again on Wednesday. There was a fast in the fifth month of the year.

There was a fast in the seventh month of the year. And they had created this system of righteousness by which they judged themselves righteous and those who did not fast as sinners. We looked and saw, what did God intend a fast to be? Remember over in Isaiah 58? Maybe we ought to review that.

Turn quickly to Isaiah 58. Isaiah 58. God defines what a fast ought to be.

He starts out that chapter by saying, you all are fasting and expecting me to listen to your prayers, and I'm not going to. Because you're fasting for your own purposes. Now, He doesn't say

fasting is wrong.

But He says if you want to fast, here's the kind of fast I'm looking for. And starting in verse 6, He says, isn't this the fast that I have chosen? If you want to fast, here's what you do. Lose the bonds of wickedness.

Undo the heavy burdens. This is what the Pharisees had done. They had laid this heavy burden of law-keeping, of rule-keeping, of vigilance in watching one another and measuring one another and accusing one another.

Undo that heavy burden. Let the oppressed go free. Break every yoke.

Do not yoke your fellow Israelites. Do not yoke your fellow believers. And in your observance of relationship with God, to use that as a club to browbeat other believers, to judge them unrighteous, to judge them less spiritual than yourself, don't put that yoke on others.

The fast that God is looking for is to share your bread with the hungry, He says in verse 7. That you may bring to your house the poor who are cast out. When you see the naked, that you cover him. Notice the contrast.

We don't find the poor and the naked and put a yoke on them and lay a burden on them. And say, well, if you will do the following six things, God will accept you and your problems will go away. He says don't find them and saddle them with a heavy burden and put a yoke on them.

Cover them. Feed them. Clothe them.

Don't hide yourself from your own flesh. Then, your light shall break forth like morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you. The glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.

If we have it as our goal to reflect the glory of God, we will not oppress one another. We won't judge one another. We won't point the finger at one another.

Now, we're going to be coming back to Isaiah 58 in a few minutes, but I want to continue and finish our outline. That was the fasting that God was looking for. To grant freedom.

To grant ministry to others. Not to burden them. Not to judge them.

Not to oppress them. Following that in Mark, now down in chapter 2, verse 23, they were going through the grain fields and the disciples were accused of harvesting, of working on the Sabbath. Breaking the Sabbath injunction not to work.

And so, if you come out one more level, this ought to be roughly equal with the leper up above in your outline. You can put eating wheat, eating the grain. So, we have the synagogue on the Sabbath.

In from that, we have the leper. In from that, we have the paralytic. The centermost eating with the sinners.

Then coming back out, we have not fasting. Then we have eating the wheat on the Sabbath. Breaking the Sabbath.

And then our outermost line, our final line and seventh line, you can put this back out against the left margin, in chapter 3, verse 1, we find Jesus in the synagogue on the Sabbath. In the synagogue on the Sabbath. This is our big bracket that defines this chiasm.

Now, you may look at this and say, well, I'm not sure I see a whole lot of correspondence between some of these points. But we're going to look at this just briefly here this morning. Now, let's take a look at the leper, our second line there.

When He healed the leper and told him to go perform the ritual, that ritual was designed to communicate some truth. Everything that Jesus did in His ministry, think about this, He came and He healed. He cast out demons.

He cleansed the leper from his infirmity, that living death. That separation from Israel. He restored him.

What was the purpose? What was the point? Did Jesus come with His main purpose of alleviating suffering? Is that why He came? That's one of the things He did. But is that why He came? Did He come and say, boy, you know, there are just so many sick people in the world here at 0 A.D. or at 30 A.D. There's just too many sick people. I'm going to go down and heal a bunch of them so we don't have quite so much sickness in the world.

Was that the reason that He came? There was sickness and disease before that. There was sickness and disease throughout the world during His ministry and there has been sickness and disease ever since. If Jesus came to heal sickness and disease, He didn't do a very good job, did He? Because it existed beforehand.

He did not heal everyone in Israel and everyone in the surrounding regions. And we've had sick and afflicted ever since. It is obvious, is it not, that that's not why Jesus came.

So if He did heal and if He did cast out demons, there was a reason for it. There was a purpose and it wasn't just to make people feel better. It was to teach something.

It was to emphasize something, to demonstrate something. And He points out that this was the purpose of the whole Mosaic law. What was the purpose of the law? Just to give people some rules to keep? Just to sort of hem them in so they didn't hurt each other? To give them some sort of a system of justice so they didn't have total chaos and run amok? No.

Because that was not a success either. Did the Mosaic law bring the people of Israel into perfect obedience and perfect life with one another and a great happy utopia? It did not. The history of Israel as you trace it through the Old Testament is the most mixed up, confused, abusive, idolatrous, God-forsaken society that you can imagine.

So if that was the purpose of the Mosaic law, it didn't work, did it? What was the purpose of that ritual? What was the purpose of those sacrifices and those rules and laws that God gave? To teach. To make us learn something. What had happened in Jesus' day? That ritual was no longer teaching.

It was no longer edifying. It was no longer putting life inside people's souls. It had become an empty, useless, evil system.

It was a system by which people beat each other over the head, by which they judged each other, by which they accused one another. What do the Pharisees, the religious leadership in Israel, do throughout the Gospels? They accuse. They condemn.

They plot against. They oppose. They follow around.

They question. They mock. That's what the ritual system had been perverted into.

That's the old garment. That's the stretched out wineskin. They had taken something good, something that was supposed to contain life and be flexible and be useful, and they turned it into something dead and brittle and useless, torn.

And that is right at the center of our structure here. That is the point when Jesus issues that teaching about the need for a physician. I have not come to those who are well.

It's those who are sick who need a physician. So this leper, when he was supposed to go perform the ritual, is Jesus saying, now I want you to go do a dead, empty ritual for its own sake? Obviously not. Jesus understands the purpose of that.

He says that ritual is a testimony. That's going to teach something. That's going to show something.

When we went back to Leviticus 14, you remember that beautiful symbolism of the dove. You have the two doves. One of them is slain.

He's torn apart and the other dove is dipped in his blood. The blood is allowed to run down into the bowl of living water, of running water. And that living water mixed with blood is applied to the leper and is a part of his purification process.

The living dove is set free. It's a great, beautiful picture of resurrection. That ritual, if this leper had gone and performed this as a testimony, would have been a graphic picture and one that had not

been seen in Israel in hundreds of years.

There's no recorded healing from leprosy since the time of Naaman. If that leper had gone and had seen that ritual afresh, what a great testimony to the presence and the work of Jesus Christ, His coming sacrifice, the purpose of it, to purify, to sanctify and to cleanse. And then the application of that blood to the leper's ear and his thumb and his toe.

What he takes in, what he does with his hands and how he walks in his life. Separated and sanctified for service. What a beautiful ritual.

Jesus said, this is your opportunity, Mr. Leper. I have healed you for a purpose. Go and give this testimony.

But the leper had a different idea, didn't he? He said, this is great. I can be a celebrity. I can give God the glory.

And in the process, I myself am certain to be popular. I can draw a crowd. Attention will be drawn to myself.

And I'm sure that at some deep level, this appeal to the leper after being such an outcast and being rejected by everyone, now he's accepted. He draws a crowd. People come to hear his story.

And oh, he gives God the glory. Jesus healed. Jesus cleansed me.

What a great God we have. Praise be to God. And yet, who is sitting at the center of the crowd? And who is the focus of attention on? The leper.

What happened to the testimony? What happened to the blood? What happened to the need for cleansing? To the sanctification for service that would have been pictured in that great testimony that Jesus asked him to give? It never happened. The testimony was never given. And as a result, people flocked to Jesus Christ for precisely the wrong reason.

This happens in Christianity today, doesn't it? We offer God as the big Band-Aid, the big Excedrin pill, the big shot of Novocain. If you have pain, if you have problems, come to Jesus. He will fix you up.

He'll solve your problems. He'll give you a better life. The prosperity gospel.

That's not what Jesus preached. In this world, ye shall have tribulation. We don't hear that in the prosperity gospel, do we? Come to Jesus so you can suffer.

There's a popular message. Come to Jesus so you can be afflicted. Come to Jesus so that your life can be a testimony in suffering.

So that God can demonstrate His power in your weakness, in your frailty, in all of the bad things in your life. Well, that doesn't make a very good evangelistic message. We don't like to preach that.

But that's the truth. That's what Jesus calls us to. He says, if you're going to come to Me, count the cost.

Be prepared. Don't fool yourself into thinking I'm the big panacea. That comes in the next life.

We get all of our problems solved and we get the great millennial kingdom in the future with Jesus in perfection on down the road. And it's going to last forever. And that's our hope.

That's our motivation to stick it out in this world of trial and tribulation. That's what comforts us and encourages us and motivates us. Recognizing that this is our chance for God to demonstrate His strength in our weakness.

Knowing that for all eternity, He's going to do all of those things. Perfection, completeness, fellowship with God face to face. So that ritual for the leper did not happen.

It was designed to communicate something about Jesus Christ. Ritual communicates reality. That's its function.

That's its purpose. It's a shadow. It's a symbol.

How big an axe we have gotten wrapped around in Christianity over the Lord's table. The bread and the cup. Dead seas of ink have been spilled.

Transubstantiation. Consubstantiation. Does the bread turn into flesh? Does the wine turn into blood? We've gotten it all messed up.

The ritual is supposed to communicate a reality. It is not the reality. It represents.

It teaches. It educates us. It gets in our soul and helps us understand something.

And how often we completely miss that. Ritual communicates reality. Now, if you look at your seven-line chiasm there, you'll notice that corresponding to the leper, we have the eating of the wheat on the Sabbath.

Sabbath observance. It's a ritual. It was designed to communicate reality.

We just reviewed that reality in Isaiah 58. If you go to the end of Isaiah 58, he said, stop turning your foot away from my Sabbath. Start doing the things that are in keeping with the real Sabbath.

Isaiah 58, 13. If you turn your foot away from the Sabbath, they said you're kicking my Sabbath around. You're abusing it.

Turn your foot away from my Sabbath. From doing your pleasure on my holy day. Your pleasure on my holy day.

In this age, every day is our Sabbath. We don't pick one day of the week. We don't set aside one day of the week to put God first.

We're in a higher category here. We're held to a higher standard. Every day is our Sabbath day.

Every day we should set aside as God's holy day and not be pursuing our own pleasure. We should be calling the Sabbath a delight. The holy day of the Lord.

Honorable. Honor Him. Not doing your own ways.

Nor finding your own pleasure. Nor speaking your own words. Then you shall delight yourself in the Lord and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth.

And feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the Lord has spoken. This is what the Sabbath was supposed to be.

A time to reflect the glory of God. And what are the Pharisees doing on this Sabbath day? Chasing around after a raggedy band of 13 men to find something to accuse them with. To find something to find fault.

Find something to consider themselves superior. To put away this threat of this new teaching and this attack on their legitimacy as the holy men in Israel. That ritual of Sabbath observance was designed to communicate a reality.

And it had been perverted to where it no longer did. And Jesus in His teaching on that Sabbath day tries to get them back. He says, look.

Go back to your own Scriptures. Look at what David did. Did David not eat of the showbread? David understood the difference between reality and ritual.

He understood the difference between human need and superficial self-righteousness. David understood that. You have the example in the Old Testament.

Why can't you see it here? But the Pharisees were blind. That ritual no longer communicated the truth. Ritual communicates reality.

And you can write that down next to the eating of wheat on the Sabbath. Jesus tried to point Israel back to the reality of the Sabbath. He tried to point Israel to the reality of Himself.

To breathe life back into those rituals. Look at the episode of the paralytic that was let down through the roof. We're going to look at our innermost bracket here.

The paralytic was let down through the roof and the issue there was Jesus' authority over sin. Remember that? I'm going to say to this man, take up your bed and walk so that you'll know that I have authority over sin. I'm the Messiah.

Who else can say your sins are forgiven you? Who else can make that an easy thing? Only the Messiah. Only Jesus Christ. And if you look at the episode that corresponds to it, His disciples not fasting, not mourning, not denying themselves like John's disciples and the Pharisees did.

What was the issue there? What was the point of that fasting? Jesus said, how can the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? The reality is here. Why should there be any cause for mourning? Wait until I'm gone, then the friends of the bridegroom will fast. That's when they're going to mourn.

That's when they're going to be disappointed. The fasting had the idea of recognizing the presence of Jesus Christ. Why did the disciples not fast? They recognized His presence.

They knew that He was here. They had been disciples of John. Remember Peter and Andrew, James and John had been disciples of John the Baptist.

They knew all about the fasting that John and his disciples went through and they didn't do that when Jesus came. Why? In the same way that the episode of the paralytic encourages Israel to recognize His authority over sin, that lack of fasting encouraged them to recognize His presence and to recognize His teaching. Recognition of Jesus Christ is the issue in those two points.

In our outermost level of the bracket, we have Jesus starting out in the synagogue on the Sabbath. We have Jesus back again, Mark says, in the synagogue on the Sabbath at the beginning of chapter 3. What did Jesus do the first time He was in the synagogue on the Sabbath? Cast out a demon? And later that day, He healed Peter's mother-in-law of a fever. Victory over evil.

Victory over disease. Now in chapter 3, verse 1 of Mark, what is He going to do? He entered the synagogue again and a man was there who had a withered hand. Think back again to Leviticus chapter 14, the blood on the thumb.

What did it represent? Sanctified for service. With the ears, we take in the Word of God. With the hands, we obey.

We do the works of the Lord. We do it in our feet, our walk. We continue forward in obedience and faith in God's plans.

The hands symbolize the ability to do, the ability to function, to perform one's work, to perform one's ministry or one's mission. Here's a man with a withered hand. And there's a sense in which he pictures Israel at this time.

Israel, the people of God. Israel with the law and the prophets and their writings. Israel with the ministry of John the Baptist.

But they are so trapped in ritual, trapped in the deadness and the encrustations of tradition that they can no longer stretch out their hand and function as the people of God. They're withered, they're shriveled. And it's interesting that this word here when it says man who had a withered hand or a shriveled hand, this is a participle.

I'm going to get into some fancy Greek here so don't panic. This is a perfect participle. And this tells us that this man was not born with a withered hand.

This was not a congenital defect. This man was born and grew up normal. And this participle, if you want to translate it literally, it says a man whose hand had become withered.

It happened sometime later in life. He was normal and something happened to him that shriveled him. This is exactly what happened to Israel.

Israel did not start out a shriveled people. Look at the Israelites crossing the Jordan, going in and conquering Jericho and Ai and Bethel and all of the other... Caleb going up into his mountain and conquering the Anakim, the giants, as a man of 85, the oldest man in Israel, asked for the mountain. Give me the hard place, Caleb said.

God has been with me thus far and He will be with me and give me victory over the giants. And the oldest man in Israel took the mountain with the giants when they went into the land. That was where Israel began.

That was their heritage. But by this time, they had shriveled. They had withered.

They had become unable to perform their function. Now, verse 2, So they watched him. We know who the they is.

These are the religious leaders that we have seen in the recent episodes of Mark. They watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath in order that they might accuse him. They haven't read Isaiah lately, have they? They're not using the Sabbath to free, to lift the yoke, to take away the oppression and the burden, to lift up and encourage and help, to honor God.

What are they doing? They're pointing the finger. They're placing a yoke, a yoke of their own making. Where in the Word of God does it say, Thou shalt not heal on the Sabbath? Thou shalt not restore life on the Sabbath? In one of the other Gospels, Jesus points this out in a graphic fashion when He says, Look, which of you, if you have an ox or a donkey that's in trouble on the Sabbath, don't grab him and pull him out and deliver him? And yet, you throw rocks at the Lord of glory for healing on the Sabbath.

So He says to the man with the withered hand, Step forward. He literally says, Stand up in the

middle. Now, He stands this man up in the middle.

Everything Jesus does has a purpose. There's an interesting thing when you go through all the different healings that Jesus has done. Sometimes He spits on the ground and rubs mud on someone's eyes.

Sometimes He lays His hand on. Sometimes He does it at a distance. Every detail of what Jesus does is important.

And it's important to note here that He stands this man up in the midst of them. This man has become a symbol for all of those people gathered about. He stands them up in the midst and He says, Look, this is you.

Here you are. He says, Stand up in the midst. And He says to them, to those who wish to accuse Him, Is it right? This is the word *ex-estin* in Greek.

That means, Is it right? Is it morally good? Is it ethical? Is it the proper thing? He doesn't say *agathos*, good of intrinsic value. He says, Look, by any standard that you want to use of right and wrong. He doesn't tie this even to God's righteousness.

He says, By any standard, what would you say on the Sabbath? Is it right to do good or to do evil? To save life or to kill? Well, by anyone's, even the loosest standards you want to name, it's hard to find someone who says it's right to do evil or it's right to kill. Now, people have their own definitions of right and wrong, but the idea here is, no matter how far gone you are in your perception, can you not see that on the Sabbath we have a choice here? And He's contrasting Himself and them. They have come to accuse.

They have come to find an occasion to kill Him on the Sabbath. He is about to restore, to heal, to save. Which is better? Now, the scary thing about this episode comes in the next verse.

They kept silent. What answer is there to that question? Oh no, we think it's better to kill on the Sabbath. We think it's better to do evil on the Sabbath.

If they take that line, they're condemned out of their own mouths. If they agree with Jesus Christ, then the opportunity to accuse Him is lost. They have no choice but to remain silent.

But there's a great quote. I don't know who said it, but I'm sure you've heard it. You have not convinced a man because you have silenced him.

You can argue. You can use logic. You can knock all of the theoretical props out from under someone's position and they will stand there, cornered, staring at you and will not agree.

You have not convinced a man because you have silenced him. And God has not sent us here just to silence people, to argue them into the kingdom. Because you can remove every argument,

every obstacle.

People have their mind made up and they will not change their mind. And that's the case here. They keep silent.

When He had looked around at them with anger, notice this is one of the few times we see Jesus Christ angry. Anger is not always a sin, is it? Jesus was angry in the temple when He cast out the money changers. He's angry here.

And why is He angry? And why is He grieved? He is grieved by the hardness of their hearts. Now this hardness of heart is a word called porosis. Remember osteoporosis? What is that? Your bones become brittle.

They become hard. That's a process that takes place over time. The words in Greek that come from porosis all deal with a process.

This is something that happened over time. This wasn't an instantaneous decision on the part of these leaders. This is the result of many years of favoring self-righteousness over God's righteousness.

Of favoring ritual over reality. Of sticking with tradition instead of being cut open and changed by the Word of God. Porosis.

Jesus is angry and Jesus is grieved. The word here for grief contains in it the word that we get lupus from. And you know lupus is named after the wolf.

The lone wolf. It was the Greek word for mourning, for being grieved. The wolf is named lupus because of his howl, his mournful howl in the middle of the night.

It's such a soul-piercing, mournful, melancholy sound. And so they pulled that Greek word through the Latin and called it lupus. And this is the word here.

Jesus grieves. He mourns. At the same time that He's angry, He's mourning because of this porosis, this hardness of heart.

And He says to the man, Stretch out your hand. Now this man obeys. He stretches out his hand.

And in that obedience, notice it doesn't just say, and they looked and behold, the man's hand was restored. It was the response to obedience. Jesus said, Stretch out your hand.

He gave him a command to follow. How often we see this in the healings of Jesus. Go wash in the brook.

Go back to your house. Jesus gives a command that requires obedience. He tells the ten lepers, Go and worship at the temple.

And as they go, they were healed. Stand up, rise, take up your bed and walk. And in that obedience, the healing takes place.

There's an element of faith. There's an element of obedience that is tied to this. He says, Stretch out your hand.

And He stretched it out. He did what Jesus said. A very simple thing.

But He stretched it out. And a man with a withered hand, with all of his embarrassment, with all of his furious standing in the midst of a crowd, how many handicapped people want to stand up in front of a crowd and display their handicap? This took some faith. He said, Stretch out your withered hand.

And He did it. And as He did, it was healed. In the face of this miracle, what happens? The Pharisees went out and plotted with the Herodians against Him, how they might destroy Him.

Now, I don't know about you, but this scares me. Can we stand in the very presence of God? Can we stand in the presence of God's work and God's healing power and miss it? Can we get so entrapped in defending our thinking, our tradition, our ritual, our way of operating, that we totally miss God's truth? We totally miss God's life, God's restoration, God's blessing.