

**THE REAL JESUS**  
**A Series on the Book of Mark**  
**“The Untamed Jesus”**  
**Mark 2:13-3:6**  
**New City Church of LA**  
**October 12, 2008**

**I. Vision of New City**

Welcome to New City. We are a brand new multi-ethnic multi-socioeconomic come-as-you-are church right here in downtown LA.

Our vision is to be an inclusive gospel-centered community of lovers of Jesus Christ who connect people to God, grow together, serve the city, and extend God’s Kingdom.

Focus on getting involved in serving. You don’t have to feel committed to the church first. You can serve and get a feel for the church. Connection Card.

**II. Introduction to the Series on Book of Mark**

We are in the middle of a series called THE REAL JESUS, a series on the Book of Mark.

We said that people are interested in Jesus, but on their own terms. The problem with that is that Jesus on your own term is just a projection of yourself or what you want. And this Jesus can’t change you, can’t challenge you, and can’t correct you because it is you. Only the REAL JESUS can change you. I think Mark is arguably the best place to go for the real Jesus, the raw, unadulterated, unfiltered, straight-up Jesus.

**III. Reading of the passage**

Let’s read Mark 2:13-3:6

[Comment as we read]

Have you ever read the Old Testament and wondered what to do about all the rules and commands that are in there? Are we supposed to obey all the stuff? There are stuff in there about what a woman is supposed to do during her period; there’s stuff in there about what to do if someone hurts another person—personal injury laws, what we are supposed to eat and not eat; there are stuff in there about how we are supposed to

worship God—if you ever read Leviticus, there’s a lot of stuff about how to worship God, bring sacrifices and all. Just last week was the Yom Kipper, the Day of Atonement. There are so many rules about the Day of Atonement in the Old Testament.

There are a lot of laws in the Old Testament. One theologian named Jean Calvin divided the laws into three categories: first, the civil laws—meaning laws of the land—like what happens when you accidentally hurt someone’s sheep. Second, there are ceremonial laws: laws like food laws, clean laws, temple laws, circumcision laws, sacrificial laws. Then third, there are moral laws—like the Ten Commandments.

Most people wonder about what to do with all these laws. Some of you have been reading the Old Testament and are completely lost. What do I do with all these laws?

In the passage for today, Jesus teaches us the key to understanding the Old Testament. It’s so awesome. It’s so beautiful.

*This passage tells us about (1) the old grid,(2) the incompatibility of the new and the old grids, and (3) the new grid.*

#### **IV. First, the old grid.**

The teachers of the law and the Pharisees were religious leaders of the society at the time. When they saw Jesus having dinner with tax collectors and “sinners” they asked his disciples: “Why does he eat with tax collectors and ‘sinners?’” What happened was that Jesus recruited Levi (Matthew) to be his disciple even though Matthew was a tax collector. Jews lived under Roman occupation. Romans conquered the known world at the time. And they needed to collect taxes from their subjects. So, they got locals who are willing to collaborate with them and collect taxes for them on commission. They were viewed as traitors and were very unpopular among the people. They often cheated people out of more money and collected as much as they can because they were on commission and had the authority of the Roman government behind them. The “sinners” were categories of people who didn’t keep the laws. They weren’t as strict about being kosher; they didn’t keep the Sabbath laws; they were people of questionable family value.

For these teachers of the laws and Pharisees, it was inconceivable that a respectable rabbi would be eating dinner in one of these people’s homes. Why did they

feel this way? They believed that their righteousness or their acceptability from God depended on their keeping the Old Testament laws, particularly the stuff about eating strictly kosher food. And in order to keep the laws, they segregated themselves from people who didn't keep the laws. They looked down on them and felt that they were more righteous than them.

They believed that their worth as a person was based on how well they kept the laws, and that was the most important thing.

We see the same thing happening in the story about the Sabbath. In verses 23ff, on Sabbath, Jesus and the disciples were going through the grain fields and began to pick some heads of grain. Jews had a pretty strict system of observance of the Sabbath. There is an OT command to rest on Sabbath day and they came up with a lot of interpretation on what constitutes work and what constitutes rest. One of the things they clearly didn't do was to pick grain on the Sabbath. But, Jesus' disciples were apparently hungry and were picking them to eat. So, the Pharisees accused them and said, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?"

Then, we see another story in 3:1ff where Jesus healed a man with a shriveled hand on Sabbath, and the Pharisees are absolutely livid because Jesus healed on the Sabbath day.

They believed that their acceptability, their value, their righteousness in front of God was measured by how well they kept all these laws.

Don't we do the same? We measure our worth, acceptability and righteousness by how well we do all the dos and don'ts, how well we obey all the rules.

{ my example and story }

We see God as the law giver who comes to judge us and reward or punish us based on how well we obeyed all the rules. Our basic belief is: if we obey, God will accept us. If we don't obey, God will not accept us. The thing that we obey may differ depending on our tradition, but we feel like we have to shape up in order for God to accept us. That's what our parents told us. That's what the world has been telling us. That's what the Pharisees thought God told them. That's what the Pharisees believed and in many ways, that's what so many of us believe. But, this is the old grid. This is religion.

The problem with religion is that if you actually end up doing it, obeying it, (1) you feel you are acceptable to God and you feel superior to others who are not living up to the standard—how can you not be? You are better. You kept the rules. You did the right thing. And if end up living religiously (2) you feel like God owes you. It's only logical to think that way. You worked for it, and you deserve your wages, your reward. You feel like you sacrificed what you really want to do in order to keep God's standards, so there better be a decent payoff for the sacrifices. But, if something goes wrong in your life, you start complaining to God. I can't believe you let this happen to me; you let this happen to my family. What kind of God are you? We worked so hard to live by your rules and why are you not protecting us? Your faith is really to unravel because at the root of your faith is this sense that God, you owe me. There is a sense of entitlement.

But, if you struggle with keeping the rules, you feel like you are not acceptable to God and you feel like crap. In the back of your mind, you think that someday, you'll get yourself back on track. You'll shape up. You'll put yourself together, and God will accept you then. And you try, but it doesn't work. You get into a vicious cycle of trying and trying but can't seem to get out.

This was the assumption behind the assumption in the world that Jesus came to. And this is the assumption behind the assumption in the world that we live in.

And when we come to Jesus, we automatically assume that this is the grid that we are working from.

And Jesus comes into this world and blows it right out of the water.

**V. The old grid and the new teachings of Jesus are so radically different that they are absolutely not compatible.**

In 2:18ff, there is a story of how some people challenged Jesus about why his disciples weren't fasting. The pious Jews fasted on Mondays and Wednesdays every week. The disciples of John the Baptist fasted. The Pharisees were fasting. How aren't your disciples fasting?

What Jesus tells us in response to this question is awesome, beautiful.

First, he answers the questions directly. "How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them?" Jewish weddings took like a week, and during this week,

there was no fasting, there was drinking, partying and celebrating. Nothing was to get in the way of celebrating. And Jesus equated himself as a bridegroom, and said, how can they fast when there is a party going on? It looked like Jesus liked to party. But, he noted that there will be a time for fasting. He wasn't against fasting; he was against fasting for fasting sake.

And then, he does something brilliant!

He tells them two short parables. Why is Jesus telling them these parables? How are they related to the question at hand about why his disciples don't fast? Let's look at them carefully.

He says in verse 21, "No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse."

If you have an old jean and you have a hole in your jean and you patch an unshrunk cloth on your old jean, what happens? The new patch is going to shrink and tear off the old piece. What is he saying? What do you think?

Well, he tells another parable. "And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, he pours new wine into new wineskins."

Old wineskins get dry and brittle. New wineskins are moist and elastic. When new wine goes into an old wineskin, it's going to burst because new wine produces gas and it's going to need some elasticity. It needs some space to expand. But, if you put new wine into new wineskin, it is going to be okay. What is Jesus saying? Why is he suddenly talking about wine and wineskin?

Jesus is saying old and the new do not mix. He is saying that you can't just add Jesus into your pre-existing world view/grid. You worldview and Jesus don't mix! Religion and Jesus don't mix. Here, Jesus answers the reason behind the question about fasting.

Why are they asking about fasting? What is the underlying reason? They think that Jesus should fit into their understanding of how to get close to God. They think that Jesus should fit into their system, their world view, their religion, their box, their grid. And Jesus is saying, No. I am the new cloth. I am the new wine. You can't just tack me on to your existing world view. You can't just add me to your life.

We often try to do that with Jesus. For example, I think we all come to God already as a political liberal or a conservative. And we try to judge Jesus based on whether he fits into our view or not.

We sometimes come as a gay person or straight person and we come with pre-existing framework regarding our sexuality and what is okay and what is not, and we come to see if Jesus fits into our world view regarding sexuality. If he fits and he helps us in other matters, we like it. If he doesn't fit, we ultimately walk away.

And many of us come to Jesus with the assumption that it's all about keeping the laws of God; it's all about traditional family values. We all have to repent and shape up.

Jesus is saying, I am so radical. My worldviews are so radically different that you have to throw away your grid as you come to me. You can't try to add me into your life like Tylenol, something to help you get by your life, someone to make you feel better about your life, someone to affirm you and what you are doing.

Jesus is saying, you can't domesticate me. You can't tame me. I am the untamed lion. C.S. Lewis describes Aslan, a Jesus figure in the Chronicles of Narnia, as a gentle, but a *dangerous* lion. Jesus is the untamed lion. We can't reduce him to our expectations, our box, our religion, our grid. He is bigger than that.

Jesus and the Gospel he brings absolutely can't just be tacked on to your existing life. You have to start a brand new life. He is not here to just patch up your old life and make it better. He is here to give you a new life.

## **VI. Third, What do we learn about the new grid of Jesus?**

(1) A new grid about our relationship with God: It's not: we obey God's laws and so, therefore we are accepted. It is: we are accepted by grace and therefore, we obey God. The Pharisees who criticized Jesus association with the tax collectors and sinners thought their righteousness was based on their strict adherence to the law of God, but Jesus is saying that God has come to us in the midst of our sickness, our lostness, our emptiness, our brokenness. "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." We didn't need to get ourselves fixed up first. We just had to come as we are, and he accepts us, not because we deserve it but because of his gracious love for us, and takes us on a journey of healing. This is really

important. This is the distinction between religion and the gospel. Religion says: I obey; so, I am accepted; but the gospel says, I am accepted, so, I obey. It is fundamentally different. For most of us, we are all trained to think that we are accepted only when we perform, when we obey, when we shape up. But, Jesus says, if you think like that you are going to be like the Pharisees and end up becoming intolerant and judgmental. I also don't think Jesus is saying that the Pharisees are righteous. I think he is saying that one requirement for coming to God is not righteousness through keeping all the dos and don'ts but knowing that you are not righteous, that you are messed up as much as anyone.

(2) A new grid about our relationship with others: The new way is not about dos and don'ts. It's about meeting needs of people. It's about love. It's not that after we enter into the Kingdom of God that we become focused on dos and don'ts again. Jesus is saying we need to focus on something greater than that.

In response to the allegation from the Pharisee about the disciples picking grain on Sabbath, how did Jesus respond? In verse 25ff, Jesus answered:

"Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? 26 In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions."

What does he mean by this? Jesus is saying that when David and companions were hungry and in need, they ate the special bread which was in the tabernacle's place of holies, which the Old Testament laws said that only the priest can eat. So, David and his companions violated the laws of God because of their needs. What is Jesus saying? He is laying out one of the most powerful principles of his teachings: meeting human needs, loving people, is more important than the law. Put another way, he is saying that meeting human needs or loving people is at the heart of the law. If you miss that, you missed the intent of the law. For example, the intent of the law regarding Sabbath was to help people (Sabbath was created for man, and not man for the Sabbath), not enslave people.

In the next story, when Jesus saw a man with a shriveled hand, the Pharisees focused on the letter of the law, and not the heart of the law. If the Sabbath law was there for man, how can it not make sense to heal on the Sabbath? Again, the point he is

making is that meeting human needs is more important than keeping the law because it is at the heart of the law.

Also, in the story of the party at Matthew's house, again, here Jesus is teaching us that meeting people's needs for spiritual healing, reconciling them into a relationship with God, is more important than keeping the laws because it is at the heart of the law.

So, Jesus is leading us to this incredible principle that people matter to God more than law, more than dos and don'ts, because ultimately the heart of the all dos and don'ts is meeting the needs of people.

It is because people matter to God that God came down in the person of Jesus, and went to the cross, and died for our sins so that we can be accepted unconditionally and become empowered to live for the needs of others.