

CIC 4-14-24

The point of today's message can only be understood when you look at the story in its entirety, like from an airplane at 10,000 feet.

Today, there will be a lot of reading in Mark's biography of Jesus.

- Normally, we don't read so much scripture but our approach in this sermon series requires it.
- It is not a bad thing; it is something churches should do. Paul says we are to 'Devot yourself to the public reading of Scripture (1Tim 4:13 NIV).'

We are looking at the large segments of Mark that belong together.

- In the first half, Jesus served people through miracles, deliverances, and preaching repentance. Peter's declaration that Jesus is the Messiah (8:29) is the turning point to the second half.
- In the second half, Jesus is the suffering savior who purchases our salvation with his life.

Today's stories give us the means of entrance into God's kingdom and teaches us about faith.

### **Entrance into God's Kingdom & Faith**

Mark 10:1-31; 11:12-25



Let's jump right in.

#### **1. Marriage, 10:1-12.**

'Then Jesus left Capernaum and went down to the region of Judea and into the area east of the Jordan River. Once again crowds gathered around him, and as usual he was teaching them. <sup>2</sup>Some Pharisees came and tried to trap him with this question: "Should a man be allowed to divorce his wife?" <sup>3</sup>Jesus answered them with a question: "What did Moses say in the law about divorce?" <sup>4</sup>"Well, he permitted it," they replied. "He said a man can give his wife a written notice of divorce and send her away (Mk 10:1-4 NLT).'"

The Pharisees are hostile and trying to trap Jesus. It is possible they were trying to draw him into an argument between two camps of Pharisees.

The Trap:

#### **1. Two Rabbinic Camps on Divorce:**

- Shammai – adultery or failure to follow the Law.<sup>1</sup>
- Hillel – adultery, failure to follow the Law, or anything that annoys or embarrasses. More likely, they were hoping Jesus would say something to support John the Baptist’s condemnation of Herodias and Herod Antipas.

2. Get Jesus to condemn Herodias & Herod Antipas. Herodias left her husband and married Antipas. They hoped to get Jesus killed by Herod like John the Baptist.

The pharisees response is that divorce is permissible.

‘But Jesus responded, “He wrote this commandment only as a concession to your hard hearts. <sup>6</sup>But ‘God made them male and female’ from the beginning of creation. <sup>7</sup>“This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, <sup>8</sup> and the two are united into one.’ Since they are no longer two but one, <sup>9</sup>let no one split apart what God has joined together.” <sup>10</sup>Later, when he was alone with his disciples in the house, they brought up the subject again. <sup>11</sup>He told them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries someone else commits adultery against her (Mk 10:5-11 NLT).’

Jesus points out that Moses’ concession is because of hard and sinful hearts.

- Moses’ allowance (Dt 24:1-4) was ‘not to make divorce acceptable but to ... control the consequences’ of sin.<sup>2</sup> It was designed to protect the rights of women so they could remarry, otherwise they would be destitute.<sup>3</sup>

Jesus brushes all that aside and goes back to God’s intention for marriage: one biological man and woman becoming unified – one flesh.

Let me quickly summarize Jesus’ teaching.

Jesus’ Teaching:

- Promotes a high standard: divorce & remarry = adultery. This is a warning to not divorce.
- Jesus’ point: divorce reveals the fallenness of the human heart.

Often in his teaching, Jesus will raise the bar to show that no one can meet God’s standard without grace. I believe this is one of those cases.

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<sup>1</sup> William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark NICNT* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), p. 353.

<sup>2</sup> Lane, *Mark NICNT*, p. 355.

<sup>3</sup> Lane, *Mark NICNT*, p. 354.

- For example, in the Sermon on the Mount: if you even look at a woman lustfully, you have committed adultery in your heart or anger is the same as murder (Mt 5:28, 22).
- Sometimes, because of sin, sometimes it is impossible for two people to live together – hence the exception, but we are to never lose sight of the higher goal of two becoming one.
- Consider what Paul wrote: ‘If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone (Ro 12:18 NIV).’ The goal is to get along peacefully, but sometimes that is not possible because of sin.
- Jesus’ teaching here reveals that ‘All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Ro 3:23 NIV).’

Verse 12 is interesting: ‘And if a woman divorces her husband and marries someone else, she commits adultery (Mk 10:12 NLT).’

- Jewish women could not divorce their husbands. This sentence reflects Roman law (50-40 B.C.). For example, Herodias left her husband Herod Philip and then sent him a letter of divorce after she settled in.
- In an indirect way, Jesus supports John the Baptist’s condemnation of Herodias and Herod Antipas.

Continuing ...

## 2. Children, 10:13-16.

‘One day some parents brought their children to Jesus so he could touch and bless them. But the disciples scolded the parents for bothering him. <sup>14</sup> When Jesus saw what was happening, he was angry with his disciples. He said to them, “Let the children come to me. Don’t stop them! For the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like these children. <sup>15</sup> I tell you the truth, anyone who doesn’t receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it (Mk 10:13-15 NLT).”’

The disciples considered children unimportant, this is worldly thinking.

But we are to ‘receive the Kingdom ... like a child.’

- The only way into the kingdom of God is to receive it as a gift.
- For example, a child brings a parent a poorly drawn piece of art – the parent loves it, but it has no real value except the intention of the child’s heart. That coloring has no real value. But because we love the child, we receive it as a treasure – we exchange grace for relationship.

- This segment teaches ‘For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith (Ep 2: 8 NIV).’ We cannot earn it through merit.
- To enter God’s kingdom, one must receive God’s grace like a child.

‘Then he took the children in his arms and placed his hands on their heads and blessed them (Mk 10:16 NLT).’

In contrast to the calloused attitude towards children, Jesus blesses them.

The theme of receiving grace is continued in the next section.

### 3. Money, 10:17-31.

‘As Jesus was starting out on his way to Jerusalem, a man came running up to him, knelt down, and asked, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”<sup>18</sup> “Why do you call me good?” Jesus asked. “Only God is truly good.<sup>19</sup> But to answer your question, you know the commandments: ‘You must not murder. You must not commit adultery. You must not steal. You must not testify falsely. You must not cheat anyone. Honor your father and mother.’”<sup>20</sup> “Teacher,” the man replied, “I’ve obeyed all these commandments since I was young.”<sup>21</sup> Looking at the man, Jesus felt genuine love for him (Mk 10 17-21a NLT).’

Here is a rule follower, a good person, someone trying to obtain the Kingdom of God by merit. He has ‘obeyed them all,’ a good rule follower.

Jesus is amazing here:

- He affirms and respects the Law, but he will point out that it is ‘utterly impossible to attain the Kingdom of God through human achievement.’<sup>4</sup>

“‘There is still one thing you haven’t done,” he told him. “Go and sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”<sup>22</sup> At this the man’s face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions.<sup>23</sup> Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God!”<sup>24</sup> This amazed them. But Jesus said again, “Dear children, it is very hard to enter the Kingdom of God.<sup>25</sup> In fact, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God!”<sup>26</sup> The disciples were astounded. “Then who in the world can be saved?” they asked.<sup>27</sup> Jesus looked at them intently and said, “Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But not with God. Everything is possible with God (Mk 10:21b-27 NLT).”

- This rule-follower has kept all the commandments. He is wealthy. He has it all. Jesus says, ‘one thing you lack.’
- Jesus puts his finger on the problem by calling him to self-denial and to trust him completely. The man’s heart could not let go of control and trust God. He had a false sense of security that wealth brings.

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<sup>4</sup> Lane, *Mark NICNT*, p. 363-64.

- If my hands are clenched and I control everything, it is impossible to receive God's grace. We must 'deny ourselves and take up his cross and follow Jesus (8:34).'
- Like the prior segment, this teaches us, 'It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—<sup>9</sup>not by works, so that no one can boast (Ep 2:8-9 NIV).'

Another key thought here is that everything is possible with God – when we realize we can't do it, then God alone can. An artful design.

'Then Peter began to speak up. "We've given up everything to follow you," he said. <sup>29</sup>"Yes," Jesus replied, "and I assure you that everyone who has given up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or property, for my sake and for the Good News, <sup>30</sup>will receive now in return a hundred times as many houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and property—along with persecution. And in the world to come that person will have eternal life. <sup>31</sup>But many who are the greatest now will be least important then, and those who seem least important now will be the greatest then (Mk 10:28-31 NLT).'

This was especially meaningful for Mark's audience in Rome who were experiencing persecution. God's promise still stands for us today. Persecution, sacrifice, and trials are rewarded in 'the world to come.'

- The poor will be rich.
- The sick will be whole.
- The falsely accused will be acquitted.
- The overlooked will be honored.

Now we can see where Mark was leading us, the 10,000-foot view. It is a simple plan of salvation.

Segment Summary:

- Divorce reveals hard heart – 'All have sinned (Ro 3:23).'
- Children reveals grace alone – 'For it is by grace through faith (Ep 2:8).'
- Rule keeper reveals that it is not by works – 'Not by works, so that no one can boast (Ep 2:9).'
- The question reveals the rewards of faith – 'Will have a hundred times ... eternal life (Jn 3:16).'

Salvation Plea. To enter God's kingdom, one must receive God's grace like a child.

- Our key verse is: 'For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mk 10:45 NLT).' The great exchange.

- 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (1Jn 1:9 NIV). Our part: believe and confess our sins. Repent.

After the next segment I want you to come forward.

One of my goals is for you to hear all of Mark's gospel. Therefore, we will look at another small segment.

Jesus and his disciples are just outside of Jerusalem; it occurs the day after the triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

#### **4. Prayer & Faith, 11:12-25.**

“The next morning as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. <sup>13</sup>He noticed a fig tree in full leaf a little way off, so he went over to see if he could find any figs. But there were only leaves because it was too early in the season for fruit. <sup>14</sup>Then Jesus said to the tree, “May no one ever eat your fruit again!” And the disciples heard him say it (Mk 11:12-14 NLT).’

Clearly, Jesus should not have expected figs as it wasn't in season.

‘When they arrived back in Jerusalem, Jesus entered the Temple and began to drive out the people buying and selling animals for sacrifices. He knocked over the tables of the money changers and the chairs of those selling doves, <sup>16</sup>and he stopped everyone from using the Temple as a marketplace. <sup>17</sup>He said to them, “The Scriptures declare, ‘My Temple will be called a house of prayer for all nations,’ but you have turned it into a den of thieves.” <sup>18</sup>When the leading priests and teachers of religious law heard what Jesus had done, they began planning how to kill him. But they were afraid of him because the people were so amazed at his teaching. <sup>19</sup>That evening Jesus and the disciples left the city (Mk 11:15-19 NLT).’

Clearing the Temple is connected to the fig tree:

- There were four markets on the Mount of Olives that sold animals. The Sanhedrin, who liked money, allowed the Gentile court to be used for commercial purposes. They likely got a percentage.
- The Temple looks good, but it does not bear spiritual fruit.

Why did Jesus do this?

- Jesus' action is a prelude to judgment (Mal 3:1-5).
- The court was for prayer 'for all nations (Is 56:7).' The court was so crowded that Gentiles could not pray in their area.

‘The next morning as they passed by the fig tree he had cursed, the disciples noticed it had withered from the roots up. <sup>21</sup>Peter remembered what Jesus had said to the tree on the previous day and exclaimed, “Look, Rabbi! The fig tree you cursed has withered and died (Mk 20-21 NLT)!”’

The withered tree is a vivid warning that judgment on the Temple and Israel. At least twice figs were a symbol of the Temple.

Prophecies of Figs and the Temple:

- Micah 7:1 – lack of righteousness is like a lack of figs.
- Jeremiah 8:12 – no figs due to God’s judgement.

There is a parallel between these prophecies and the cursed fig tree. Like the fig tree, the Temple looked good on the outside, but it did not bear spiritual fruit.

‘Then Jesus said to the disciples, “Have faith in God. <sup>23</sup>I tell you the truth, you can say to this mountain, ‘May you be lifted up and thrown into the sea,’ and it will happen. But you must really believe it will happen and have no doubt in your heart. <sup>24</sup>I tell you, you can pray for anything, and if you believe that you’ve received it, it will be yours. <sup>25</sup>But when you are praying, first forgive anyone you are holding a grudge against, so that your Father in heaven will forgive your sins, too (Mk 11:22-25 NLT).”

As they walked to the Temple, from the Mount of Olives, they could see the Dead Sea.

Unlike the other gospels Mark gives us only a couple teachings on prayer (14:38). Jesus sets an example of prayer (1:35; 6:46). But this teaching calls us to a big and bold faith.

- Faith in God – God nudges first.
- Believe and not doubt.
- Pray for anything and it will be done.
- Forgive, stand before God transparently.

This is not faith in faith, nor faith in magical words, but faith in the living God for whom nothing is impossible (10:27).

### **Conclusion.**

When I first arrived here at CIC, it was recovering from some trouble. Many people took the opportunity to shop around for another church. In my second year, the finances were so tight the entire church side took a 5% salary cut. It was a tough year or so.

Then, a delightful new believer sold a home and tithed off the gains. It was a step in the right direction, but a one-time gift is quickly used up. The trouble was our week-to-week tithes & offerings.

The Church Council grabbed ahold of this and said, 'Let's agree and believe that from this day forward, God is going to bless CIC's finances. Let's restore of salaries and trust God!' God has provided ever since.

Nothing is impossible with God. God has supplied every need and there has been no lack, even during C-19.