

Jesus is Lord Mk 2:18-3:19

Tim Anderson 17/3/2019

Why would someone feel threatened by Jesus?

I mean I get why people often get threatened by other people.

Some people have a way of parading their competence in front of you.

That makes you feel small and insignificant.

Some people have a way of making you feel socially inferior.

When you have a conversation around them,

you always feel a bit awkward.

But Jesus?

Why would anyone feel threatened by Jesus?

Jesus could make prostitutes

feel comfortable and accepted in his presence.

Jesus gathered ordinary folk, fishermen,

and they walked with him for three years.

They didn't feel threatened.

So why would someone feel threatened?

And yet it is undeniable that some people did feel threatened by Jesus.

In 3:6,

the Pharisees and Herodians are already planning

how they might kill Jesus.

Jesus hasn't even chosen and appointed his 12 disciples yet.

That doesn't happen till verses 13-18.

Did you realise that?

Did you realise that the religious leaders

were already planning how they might kill Jesus,

before he'd even finished calling his disciples.

It's three years before they killed him.

But they are already plotting how they might do it.

Why are they so threatened by Jesus?

You'd think they would be thrilled about Jesus.

Here is this man who is the promised King sent by God.

God had been promising a Saviour for hundreds of years.

The religious leaders were looking out for the coming of Jesus.  
They wanted the messiah to come.  
And here he is.  
You'd think they would be thrilled.  
But they are not thrilled, they are threatened.  
Why are they threatened by Jesus?

Well why does a person become a religious leader?

It could be that they are genuine  
about getting God's message out to people.

But clearly not for these folk.

Otherwise they would have been thrilled about Jesus.

But there's a dark side to religious leadership.

People can become religious leaders for the wrong reasons.

1. Power - you get to have some sort of control over people's lives.

African villagers live in fear of the witch doctor

because the witch doctor can point the bone at you.

In days gone by, high ranking church officials could speak the word,  
'No dancing. It's most unseemly for Christian people to dance.'

And people would frown upon anyone who danced.

It can go to your head,

whatever I say goes.

I say jump.

These people say how high.

There's power.

2. Position.

Being a religious leader gives you a position of status in a community.

I mean that relies on the community

having genuine affection for the religion.

Not sure there's much status in being a religious leader

right now in the Australian community.

But in Jesus' day people were unquestioning loyal to their Jewish faith.

And so religious leaders had positions of significant respect.

3. Pride.

Christianity in its true form,

is all about what God has done for you.  
It's about God coming down to us in person,  
and making the sacrifice for our sins  
while we were still sinners.  
But religion is typically  
about people trying to climb a ladder to impress God.  
And as you climb the ladder,  
you can look down at the other people on the ladder.  
And you can get proud  
because you are so much higher up the ladder than they are.  
And the attractive thing about being a religious leader  
is that you get to say what things impress God.  
You make the rules.  
Not surprising  
that the religious leaders climb the rungs of the ladder more quickly.  
They make the rules to suit themselves.

So why do the religious leaders feel threatened by Jesus?  
Because he doesn't play by their rules.  
They have set the rules about how to climb the ladder.  
And Jesus says,  
'No actually. That's not what God wants.  
Let me tell you what God wants.'  
And so if they say yes to Jesus,  
they lose their power.  
Because someone else is calling the shots.  
They lose their position.  
Because people aren't looking to them as the arbiters of religious truth.  
They lose their pride.  
Because someone else is saying what pleases God.  
And Jesus is not making any pretence.  
They don't please God.  
No wonder they feel threatened.

Let's see how Jesus upends the religious rules of the day.

The first one is the question of fasting.  
The religious leaders loved to demonstrate their superiority by fasting.  
The Old Testament actually didn't command the people to fast.  
But by Jesus day,  
the religious leaders had told people  
that twice a week was the right amount to fast.  
They fasted and they looked down on others who didn't.  
But Jesus didn't encourage his disciples to fast.  
Our reading begins, 2:18  
"Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting.  
Some people came and asked Jesus,  
'How is it that John's disciples  
and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting  
but yours are not?'  
What is Jesus' reply?  
Jesus says in effect.  
"I am the Lord of the Banquet."  
Why aren't your disciples fasting, Jesus?  
Because I am here.  
I am a cause of celebration.  
Think about a wedding feast.  
Does anyone fast while the bridegroom is there?  
Have you ever heard of a wedding where the Bridegroom said,  
"OK, instead of having a wedding banquet,  
we're going to fast for my wedding."?  
It doesn't happen.  
Wedding banquets are renowned for extravagant parties.  
Jesus says,  
far be it for my disciples to be fasting.  
I am here so that they may celebrate.  
Now let's think about it.  
Was life a riotous party for Jesus' disciples?  
No. Not really.  
They had left their families behind.  
They often slept rough.

Sometimes they did go without food for a long day.  
And then at the end of the day,  
Jesus did a miracle to feed a crowd with 5 loaves and 2 fishes.  
So Jesus' is not calling them to be party animals  
like the followers of a modern day rock star.  
But neither does he call them to self denial for the sake of it.  
If they go without food,  
it will be for the cause of good ministry -  
Jesus teaching the crowds.  
And then at the end of the day,  
Jesus will give a demonstration that he is Lord of the Banquet.  
He will feed the crowd.  
He will give a pointer to what the kingdom of God is like.  
When Jesus describes himself as the Lord of the Banquet,  
he's telling us something fundamental about God's Kingdom.  
It's not about beating yourself up  
to try somehow to be good enough for God.  
It's about accepting God's gracious provision.  
But what about the time when the Bridegroom is taken away from us?  
Are we in that time now?  
Not really.  
I think Jesus is pointing to his arrest and execution on the cross.  
That would have been an appropriate time for his disciples to fast.  
But for us now,  
well Jesus is with us.  
He is with us by his Spirit.  
He told his disciples after the resurrection,  
"I am with you to the end of the age."  
We live in the age of the Lord of the Banquet.  
And we relate to him in a new way.

To help them understand, Jesus tells them a parable  
about new wine being poured into new wineskins.  
2:22 "No one pours new wine into old wineskins.  
Otherwise the wine will burst the skins,

and both the wine and the skins will be ruined.

No they pour new wine into new wineskins."

What's the point?

Jesus is the bringer of a new covenant.

A new way of being put right with God.

A new way of having our sins forgiven.

With a new way of finding forgiveness before God,

will we package it up in the same kind of religious practices?

No. New wine needs new wineskins.

Don't expect Jesus to come and tell you

to live the same way you used to live.

Maybe you used to try to climb the ladder.

Try to impress God carrying heavy burdens of religious observance.

Maybe you used to be proud

looking down on those below you on the ladder.

Maybe you used to feel inadequate

looking at those much higher up the ladder.

Jesus has come with a new covenant.

New wine in new wineskins.

He's here to help us receive and celebrate

the goodness of God's love for us.

He's here to free us from comparisons,

whether they make us proud or inadequate.

He's the Lord of the Banquet.

He's also the Lord of the Sabbath.

That's the next part of our passage.

I wonder if you've ever felt under the microscope?

Like your every action is being watched?

Jesus was absolutely under the microscope.

It's like there were a group of people with dark sunglasses,

long trench coats, binoculars and notepads following him around.

They are looking for something to pick on.

And as he's walking along,

his disciples start picking grain from a field.

honestly the farmer doesn't mind.  
He's got a whole field and this is just a snack to keep them going.  
It was the law in Israel,  
that travellers were allowed to glean in the fields.  
There was no McDonalds  
strategically placed along the highways in those days.  
The farmer doesn't mind but the Pharisees did.  
It was the Sabbath.  
God said that the Sabbath was for resting on.  
And these disciples were doing work.  
And not just a little bit either.  
They were doing at least four kinds of work.  
They were reaping.  
You're not allowed to harvest your crops on the Sabbath.  
And here they were doing just that.  
They were threshing.  
They were taking the seeds of grain out of the husk of the corn.  
You're not allowed to thresh on the Sabbath either.  
They were winnowing.  
They were letting the husks fall to the ground  
while they kept hold of the seeds.  
No winnowing on the Sabbath.  
And they were engaged in food preparation.  
They were eating the seeds.  
You can't prepare food on the Sabbath.  
Now if we'd been there,  
we would have told the Pharisees  
to get a sense of perspective and get a life.  
But Jesus doesn't say,  
"Hey look. It doesn't matter if you break the law,  
so long as you only break it a bit."  
Like God won't fine you for 3km over  
but he will fine you for 10km over.  
Instead Jesus pointed to King David.  
King David broke the Sabbath big time when he needed to.

When David and his men entered the temple  
and ate the consecrated bread,  
they were desecrating the temple, God's holy place.  
That was far more serious than doing a bit of work on the Sabbath.  
But it was OK for David.

Why?

Because he was God's anointed King  
and he and his companions had need of sustenance  
in serving God faithfully.

Well guess what?

God's even greater anointed King was standing there among them.  
And his companions had need of sustenance in serving God faithfully.  
Notice what this hinges on.

David was God's anointed King.

The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.

Now you might think to yourself,  
all this stuff about the Sabbath is arcane.

I'm not in the slightest tempted

to put myself under a whole lot of restrictions  
about what I do on Saturdays or Sundays for that matter.

But Jesus came to pour new wine into new wineskins.

God instituted the Sabbath to call his people to share his rest.

That's what it was about fundamentally.

God rested on the seventh day

and he wanted his people to share that rest.

God wanted his people to come on holidays with him.

Would you like to go on holidays with God?

Would you like to lay down the burdens and struggles of life  
and just relax and enjoy the company of your creator?

Jesus said,

"Come to me all who labour and are heavy laden  
and I will give you rest."

How do we keep the Sabbath today?

By coming to Jesus who is the Lord of the Sabbath

and sharing in his rest.

In the next incident in our reading,  
we find out the Jesus is the Lord of life.

Jesus wanders in to the synagogue.

This is on another occasion.

It looks like Jesus is by himself this time.

He's one man.

Around him were a group of hostile faces.

Binoculars and notebooks at the ready,  
they are looking for something to object to.

Now Jesus had a choice here.

He could have said to the man,

'Look mate, it's going to create a bit of a scene if I heal you today.

Why don't we meet back here at 9am tomorrow morning.

I'll heal you then and it will be all good.'

But Jesus didn't take that option.

Why not?

Because he wasn't going to quietly acquiesce  
to the Pharisee's twisted understanding of the Sabbath.

Could the man wait one more day to be healed?

Of course he could.

No doubt he'd waited a long time already.

But Jesus needed to have that confrontation with the Pharisees,  
so that we would learn a true understanding of the Sabbath.

So Jesus healed the man's shrivelled hand on the Sabbath.

And he didn't just do it.

He did it in front of everyone.

And he did it with some teaching thrown in for good measure.

3:4 "Jesus asked them,

Which is lawful on the Sabbath:

to do good or to do evil,

so save life or to kill?"

Sometimes you get asked a question.

Would you like this or that.

But really there can only be one answer.

Father to child.

Are you going to eat your vegetables  
or am I going disconnect your mobile phone?

There is only one option really.

And of course that's how it is for Jesus' question.

No one is going to say 'let's do evil on the Sabbath'.

So then the alternative Jesus sets up is this -

there's only one other option.

You must do good on the Sabbath.

But that is what the Pharisees don't want him to do.

They want him to do nothing on the Sabbath.

And so they remained silent.

And that made Jesus angry.

3:5 "Jesus looked around at them in anger  
and deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts,  
said to the man ...."

Do you want me to help this man?

Or keep your stupid rules?

Why did God invent the Sabbath?

So that people could have rest to restore themselves.

What could be more appropriate on the Sabbath  
than restoring this man's shrivelled hand.

And you know we are all shrivelled in one way or another.

Some have a shrivelled hand,

others have a shrivelled heart, or a shrivelled mind,

or a shrivelled body.

Entering into God's rest means that Jesus the Lord of life  
can restore you when you come to him.

Some of that happens now, in this life.

Some of it will happen when we meet him face to face.

But Jesus' plans for us are life giving.

Well the Pharisees ought to be thrilled.

They should be able to celebrate with the man who was healed.

Instead they want to have Jesus killed.

People of religion are into climbing the ladder  
and looking down on others.

The people of Christ rejoice that he came down the ladder to us.  
He has revealed the face of God to us.

We live under the new covenant.

New wine has been poured into new wineskins.

We worship God Jesus' way.

That means that if you want to be part of the banquet in heaven,  
you make it a priority to get to know the Lord of the Banquet.

If you want to go on holiday with God and luxuriate in his rest,  
then you come to the Lord of the Sabbath.

If you want to know eternal life

then allow the Lord of life to restore the parts of you that are shrivelled.