

Lesson 3 14 August, 2011

Jesus Confronts His Accusers

Lesson Scope: *Mark 2:13-3:35*

Lesson Focus

The common people heard Jesus gladly. As word of the great Healer and Teacher spread abroad, multitudes began to throng Him, desiring to hear, to see a miracle performed, or to personally receive healing. Jesus turned no one away.

As Jesus' popularity increased, He began to face opposition from the Jewish leaders of the day. His teaching often ran counter to these religious professors. As they increasingly opposed Christ and His teaching, the conflict escalated. Jesus endeavored to show His accusers their error by continuing to do good and inviting them to contribute to the same cause.

Man's response to Christ and His work reveals the condition of his heart. To oppose Christ reveals a hard heart and brings the condemnation of God. In Jesus' ministry, where He was dealing with the thoughts and intents of the heart, He was bound to receive opposition from those not inclined to receive His teaching. This opposition to truth continues to the present time. The heart of man basically remains the same throughout time.

The teaching related to hardness of heart is a sobering one. Jesus sought to reach those who had hardened their hearts, but many times they failed to respond.

The sobering fact of this teaching lies in the fact that many who begin a course of hardening their hearts never return. In your teaching, stress the importance of always having open and mellow attitudes toward truth. These attitudes alone will guarantee deliverance from a hard heart and the resulting spiritual destruction.

Lesson Aim: To see evidences of hardness of heart and Christ's response to it.

Theme Verse

Proverbs 29:1. He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.

Lesson Text

Blasphemous Accusers

Mark 2:14-21 ¹⁴ And as he passed by, he saw Levi the *son* of Alphaeus sitting at the receipt of custom, and said unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him. ¹⁵ And it came to pass, that, as Jesus sat at meat in his house, many publicans and sinners sat also together with Jesus and his disciples: for there were many, and they followed him. ¹⁶ And when the scribes and Pharisees saw him eat with publicans and sinners, they said unto his disciples, How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners? ¹⁷ When Jesus heard *it*, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. ¹⁸ And the disciples of John and of the Pharisees used to fast: and they come and say unto him, Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but thy disciples fast not? ¹⁹ And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? as long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. ²⁰ But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days. ²¹ No man also seweth a piece of new cloth on an old garment: else the new piece that filled it up taketh away from the old, and the rent is made worse.

Hardhearted Plotters

Mark 3:1-6 ¹ And he entered again into the synagogue; and there was a man there which had a withered hand. ² And they watched him, whether he would heal him on the sabbath day; that they might accuse him. ³ And he saith unto the man which had the withered hand, Stand forth. ⁴ And he saith unto them, Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill? But they held their peace. ⁵ And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched *it* out: and his hand was restored whole as the other. ⁶ And the Pharisees went forth, and straightway took counsel with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy him.

Self-righteous Observers

Mark 3:22-30 ²² And the scribes which came down from Jerusalem said, He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils. ²³ And he called them *unto him*, and said unto them in parables, How can Satan cast out Satan? ²⁴ And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵ And if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand. ²⁶ And if Satan rise up against himself, and be divided, he

cannot stand, but hath an end. ²⁷ No man can enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he will first bind the strong man; and then he will spoil his house. ²⁸ Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme: ²⁹ But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation: ³⁰ Because they said, He hath an unclean spirit.

Questions for Study

Self-righteous Observers

1. Who do the "whole" and "righteous" in Mark 2:17 refer to?
2. Why were many of Jesus' followers from among the lowly or despised rather than from among the elite such as the scribes and Pharisees?

Hardhearted Plotters

3. Describe the Pharisees' watching of Jesus in Mark 3:2.
4. Why did the Pharisees refuse to answer Jesus in Mark 3:4?
5. How does hardness of heart reveal itself today?

Blasphemous Accusers

6. What was foolish about the scribes' claim that Jesus was casting out devils by the prince of the devils?
7. What can we learn from the fact that Jesus "called [His accusers] unto him"?
8. Why did Jesus severely warn the scribes of blaspheming the Holy blaspheming Ghost?

Analyzing the Passage

Levi (Mark 2:14) is another name for Matthew (compare Matthew 9:9). The publicans were the local Roman tax collectors. They had a reputation for stealing revenue by incorrect charges.

When questioned (Mark 2:18), Jesus gave two reasons why His disciples were not presently fasting. The first reason was that Jesus' disciples were presently enjoying His presence (Mark 2:19) The second reason was because old cloth and new cloth are not combined and new wine is not put into old bottles. These word pictures illustrate that the New Testament cannot mix with Old Testament ceremonies. The New Testament rather fulfills Old Testament ceremonial laws.

The hardness of heart of the Jewish religious leaders (Mark 3:5) had already begun at the time of John the Baptist's ministry. The Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God through John, whereas the publicans

repented at John's preaching and were baptized (Luke 7:29, 30). Accusing Jesus of casting out devils by Beelzebub, the prince of devils, was blasphemous. It attributed the power of the Holy Spirit to Satan. This attitude placed the scribes in danger of eternal damnation.

Principles and Applications

Self-righteous Observers

1. Christ desires that all men would follow Him (Mark 2:14, 15). Jesus was ready to share with those who received His teaching, regardless of their background or past reputation. The fact that He called Levi, who was of the despised tax collectors, illustrates that the call to salvation and discipleship is for "whosoever will."

2. Lack of compassion for the lost indicates a hard heart (Mark 2:16). The scribes and Pharisees came only to find fault. Their indifference to the spiritual needs of men stood in stark contrast to Jesus' compassion. Lack of compassion essentially is exalting self while degrading others. Only the love of God in one's heart will produce compassion for all men, regardless of their circumstances.

3. The hardhearted do not see their own need of the Great Physician (Mark 2:17). Jesus here focused on attitudes. Those who think they have no need cannot be helped. Those who recognize their need are in a position to receive help from Christ.

4. The hardhearted do not understand the joy of Christ's presence (Mark 2:18-19). The Pharisees felt anything but joy in Christ's presence because they saw Him as a rival for the praise they hoped to receive from men. His words stung their consciences, but they would only resist and therefore could neither experience peace and joy in their hearts nor understand those who did possess it.

The joy of the Lord in the hearts of God's people today motivates them in their service to Him. They desire that others would also experience that joy. The most convincing testimony is a joyful life.

Hardhearted Plotters

5. Christ's opposers seek to accuse the righteous (Mark 3:2). They reason that if they can point out failure, then the Christian life is not valid; thus they excuse themselves in their rejection of truth. Jesus foretold that His followers would experience the same persecution and rejection that He faced.

6. Failing to acknowledge revealed truth hastens the hardening process (Mark 3:4). The Pharisees knew the answers to the questions Jesus asked,

and they evaded answering to avoid embarrassment.

When people attempt to avoid or bypass truth, they are choosing a course of spiritual blindness and hardness. We must consider seriously the impact of our daily decisions. How we relate to truth directly influences our eternal destiny.

7. Hardness of heart invokes divine anger (Mark 3:5). Anger with sin and hardheartedness is just as much a divine attribute as love and compassion for those with a mellow heart. Jesus' anger was coupled with grief that the Pharisees were hardening their hearts. His attitude of grief was such as He expressed in Matthew 23:37 when he said "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem ... how often would I have gathered thy children together."

8. Hardhearted people seek support for their destructive work (Mark 3:6). The Pharisees and Herodians had some very real differences in their beliefs. But they had a common goal in seeking Jesus' destruction.

People who oppose the truth become party to actions they ordinarily would have avoided. A mob spirit can develop as in the case of the crucifixion of Jesus. The best way to avoid such a situation is to always stand for truth.

Blasphemous Accusers

9. Christ's opposers are not afraid to blaspheme His cause (Mark 3:22). Opposing Christ and His work does not stop with mild differences of belief relating to truth. Those whom Satan has in his control will be workers for his cause, which is to overthrow the work of Christ.

10. Jesus bears patiently with those who oppose Him, so that He might help them understand truth (Mark 3:23-26). The time will come when all truth rejecters will bow before Jesus and confess Him as Lord, but it will be too late for their salvation. He longs to have them bow in repentance and faith now to receive eternal life. "The Lord is ... longsuffering ... not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

11. Those who harden their hearts are in danger of eternal damnation (Mark 3:28-30). To continually harden oneself against truth is to say that I do not want what God has for me. When a person persists in such an attitude, there is no hope for him, because he is rejecting his only hope. Such is a very dangerous course that can result in nothing but eternal judgment. May we always retain mellow hearts so that we will not come to such an end.

Important Teachings

1. Christ desires that all men would follow Him (Mark 2:14-15).
2. Lack of compassion for the lost indicates a hard heart (Mark 2:16).
3. The hardhearted do not see their own need of the Great Physician (Mark 2:17).
4. The hardhearted do not understand the joy of Christ's presence (Mark 2:18-19).
5. Christ's opposers seek to accuse the righteous (Mark 3:2).
6. Failing to acknowledge revealed truth hastens the hardening process (Mark 3:4).
7. Hardness of heart invokes divine anger (Mark 3:5).
8. Hardhearted people seek support for their destructive work (Mark 3:6).
9. Christ's opposers are not afraid to blaspheme His cause (Mark 3:22).
10. Jesus bears patiently with those who oppose Him, so that He might help them understand truth (Mark 3:23-26).
11. Those who harden their hearts are in danger of eternal damnation (Mark 3:28-30).

Answers to Questions

1. Who do the "whole" and "righteous" in Mark 2:17 refer to?
These refer to those who do not feel they have a need. In the local setting it was the scribes and Pharisees.
2. Why were many of Jesus' followers from among the lowly or despised rather than from among the elite such as the scribes and Pharisees?
Those of the despised publicans, such as Levi, recognized they had a need and were eager to receive the truth. The scribes and Pharisees felt that they were without need and were harshly critical of the "publicans and sinners" (see 1 Corinthians 1:18-29).
3. Describe the Pharisees' watching of Jesus in Mark 3:2.
This was a critical watching. It was not a watching of sincere interest to see what good Jesus would do. Their intention was to accuse Jesus.
4. Why did the Pharisees refuse to answer Jesus in Mark 3:4?
They were avoiding truth. They knew it was right to do good on the Sabbath day. But because they were trying to accuse Jesus and were not open to Jesus' teaching, they refused to answer.
5. How does hardness of heart reveal itself today?
When people are faced with truth and try to justify themselves by excuses such as "I'm not so bad" or "That teaching was just for Paul's day," they are revealing hardness of heart.

When people fail to have proper relationships with other people or refuse to accept the counsel of a Scriptural church, they are also revealing a hard heart.

6. What was foolish about the scribes' claim that Jesus was casting out devils by the prince of the devils?

Jesus showed that a house divided against itself cannot stand. No one can bind Satan unless he is stronger than Satan. Only Christ can bind Satan.

7. What can we learn from the fact that Jesus "called [His accusers] unto him"?

Jesus is patient with and concerned about even those who openly oppose Him. He understands that Satan has deceived them, and He longs to reach them with the truth.

8. Why did Jesus severely warn the scribes of blaspheming the Holy Ghost?

They were attributing the obvious power of God to Satan. They were thereby denying or rejecting the power of God. In essence they were saying they did not believe in God's power. This amounts to rejecting their only hope of salvation.

Summarizing the Lesson

Hardness of heart does not happen suddenly. It begins with "little" deviations from truth. When truth is not held in high esteem, one becomes susceptible to a hard heart. May we ever remain open to truth and to the counsel and help of a spiritual brotherhood. With such attitudes, we will not become hardhearted.

Research Guide

1. Read the account of Pharaoh in Exodus 4-14, noticing that Pharaoh hardened his heart before God hardened it.

2. Read and meditate upon 2 Thessalonians 2:7-12. Note especially in verses 10-12 the deception that comes upon those who received not the love of the truth.