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Jesus Confronts the Pharisees

Mark 2

Prayer: *Father, again I thank you for the privilege that we have of coming before you, of just realizing the incredible gift that we have been given in the gospel of Jesus Christ and the cross that Jesus went to to purchase our salvation. And Lord, this once a month celebration of what you've done for us, Lord, entails us opening up your book and looking at your life and seeing what we can glean from that. And so I pray that your Holy Spirit would guide us as we open up your book, as we search it and again we pray for things that are of permanent value, and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, once again first Sunday of the month, this is the day that we celebrate Christ and his cross. And Jesus on the night before he died, he met with his disciples for a last Passover meal as described in Matthew 26. It says this: It says: Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them,

saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." So Jesus takes bread and he takes wine and he offers them up as symbols of his flesh and his blood, then he asked the disciples to eat the bread and drink the cup so that they might symbolically eat his flesh and drink his blood. He also asked them to repeat this remembrance on a regular basis. We do that, we call it "the Lord's table." We here do it once a month, and we do it by meditating on what the Lord Jesus did for us on the cross and then by examining ourselves, asking God's Holy Spirit to point out areas where he in particular is convicting us of sin and then using that time to confess our sins and then participating in the elements. *John 6:53* says: *So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."*

Well, we've been focused on the gospel of Mark, we're at the very beginning, and Jesus as servant we see is at war with the kingdom of darkness. To read Mark's gospel is to really see this conflict unfold. Last time we saw that when raw power failed to move Jesus in the slightest, the enemy just switched strategies. Fame became Satan's new M-O. If intimidation wouldn't stop Jesus, then making

him a celebrity would at least slow him down. And that's exactly what Jesus was up against. We spoke last time that Jesus faced a number of -- quote -- "compassionate distractions" as he healed the sick. I mean he knew that every one of the bodies that he was about to heal and restore was still going to eventually die and that he was here to solve the problem of death eternally. I mean Jesus knew exactly why he was here. It was to glorify his Father by rescuing hopelessly lost sinners. It was to transform hearts and to shape and mold us into his image for the glory of his Father. He knew that nothing was more important than that, including physical sickness. Remember we're still at the very beginning of Jesus' public ministry here in Mark. Jesus is still in the process of selecting his disciples. And once again we see the enemy is at work. In fact three times in this chapter, this is Mark 2, we're going to see how the enemy works. We see Jesus bringing in the good news of the new covenant, but this news is confusing. It's disturbing to those who are fully entrenched in the old ways and the enemy knows that this is an entry point that he can use to stir up strife and dissension in the kingdom of God. So three times in this passage we're going to see a clash between the old and the new understanding of the kingdom. We're going to see it in Christ's treatment of personal holiness and separation of the treatment that he has of the sadness of John's disciples versus the joy of Jesus' disciples, and then finally in the point and

purpose of Sabbath keeping. Chapter 2 of Mark's gospel is about Christ correcting and asserting the new covenant in terms of separation, in terms of sadness, and finally in terms of Sabbath keeping. We have separation, sadness and Sabbath keeping. Each one of these is an opportunity for the enemy to stir up trouble and each time the attack comes in the form of a question.

The first question answers and addresses a confusion about separation. See, the Old Testament understanding of the Jews was that they were to be separate, they were to be apart, they were to be holy. They were to be separate as God was separate and holy. We're going to find that Jesus is going to turn that understanding upside down. And so we start out at Mark 2 starting at verse 13. It says: *He went out again beside the sea, and all the crowd was coming to him, and he was teaching them. And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him.* Now Mark's gospel leaves out a very important piece of information. We're going to shoot over to Luke's gospel for one second and pick up here. This is *Luke 5:28*. This is talking about the very same incident: *And leaving everything, he rose and followed him.* This is Levi. *And Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them.* Now we can scoot back to Mark's gospel. *And as he*

reclined at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. And the scribes and the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples -- here comes the first question: -- "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

Okay. This is the first question. It's designed not to get information. It's really designed to accuse Jesus of violating the Jewish laws of separation. And in order to respond, we really do need to look into a little bit of background about what tax collectors were. They were considered by their peers to be basically on the level with pond scum. I mean the way Rome collected taxes was basically in partnership with the private sectors. And what would happen is tax collectors would put in bids for a certain area and they could win that area. Let's say I was a tax collector in Port Jervis and I put out a bid for Port Jervis for a million dollars. Well, then I'd be responsible to Rome for coming up with a million dollars, and Rome allows me to squeeze Port Jervis as much as I want in order to come up with that. And let's say I come up with a million and a half dollars. Well, I get to put the extra half million in my pocket. It was a collaborative

effort on the part of turncoat Jews and Rome that made those tax collectors rich and considered to be by normal Jews beneath contempt.

So Jesus is out walking and he spies Levi who happens to be a tax collector at his tax booth, and he says, "Follow me." And what follows is yet another of many, many things that Jesus did that confounded both his disciples and his enemies. I mean why in the world are you going to sit down with pond scum? Why in the world would you do that when you know that God has called us to live separate and holy lives? Well, Jesus' answer could easily be misconstrued. He says, *"I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."* Now you might want to conclude from what Jesus said, well, then I guess Jesus is saying some folks are righteous. Is he saying that some folks are righteous and some folks or not? Well, actually we know that that couldn't be what he's saying because Jesus made it quite clear in other passages that there is no one righteous but God. When he was approached by the rich young ruler, he said this in *Mark 10*. It says: *As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone."* Well then why did Jesus say to those gathered around Levi's table, *"I came not to call the righteous but sinners?"* Well

Jesus is actually speaking in quotes. I mean today we use air quotes to denote that we're not being literal about a particular statement. I mean Jesus was saying in effect, "I came not to call the righteous" -- meaning not really -- "but sinners." You see, somebody like Levi that he's addressing is not laboring under some kind of pretense that he's good, that he's righteous. I mean he knows he is pond scum, and he knows that because he's been told that repeatedly by his peers, and he also knows that the job that he has taken defines him as that. See, in one sense those who are marginalized by sin, that is to say those who are pushed to the outskirts of society by overt sin, people like folks like prostitutes or drug addicts or the homeless, in some ways those folks are blessed. And the reason why they are blessed is that they have the pretense of their righteousness stripped away by circumstance. I mean those of us who have jobs and homes and are not drug addicts can somehow end up thinking that because we are not pushed to those very same outskirts of society that we are somehow righteous. The problem is one of definition. I mean you may think that you're righteous compared to a prostitute or a drug addict or somebody in that kind of situation but that's not the standard that God uses to judge righteousness. Transcendent flawlessness, such that Jesus alone had, is the only standard that God refers to as righteous. And that's the essence of the gospel. The essence of the gospel is that none of us on our own is capable

of being righteous enough to stand before God. I mean if we could perfectly keep God's law, then we could be made righteous by law keeping. But understand, the operational word here is "perfect." Law keeping would have to be as flawless as God himself. *James 2:10* says: *For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.* *Galatians 3:10* says: *For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, and do them."* Well, no one's capable of doing that except Jesus. I mean Jesus alone provides us with the righteousness that we need. We become righteous through faith in what Jesus has done for us on the cross. By faith we claim Jesus's righteousness as our own. *Romans 3:21* says: *But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it -- the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*

Now Levi by placing his faith in Jesus is now justified by Christ's grace as a gift. The Pharisees can't begin to grasp why Jesus would even talk to somebody who's so mired in sin. They haven't begun to grasp the concept of the good news of the gospel and the

fact that God himself goes out to people previously shunned as unholy. I mean we look at this scene and we have a tax collector and he's hosting Jesus in this giant party but what it is, it's a farewell party. He's saying good-bye to all of those in his previous life. The Great Physician has shown him his sickness and those who still think of themselves as perfectly healthy are offended that Jesus would even sit down with someone as sick as Levi. They have no idea that their so-called spiritual health is a sham, and more often than not it takes a crisis to reveal that.

And again, I was thinking of that and I just wanted to take a moment for an aside. As I was going through the scripture and I was reading and as most of you have heard this week, I was thinking about Kobe Bryant, because in some ways it seems like his life mirrors that of Levi's. I mean Kobe Bryant was an iconic figure because he represented absolute excellence in athletics. I mean even if you had never heard the name before, you could sense by the reaction all around the world that Kobe Bryant was an extraordinary figure. I mean he clearly transcended athletics, and he was now, he had retired, he was in his 40's, he was now going about the business of making his mark on the entire world until almost at this exact moment exactly one week ago a helicopter crash took him and his daughter's life along with seven others. Just for his background, Kobe was the second youngest person ever to enter the

NBA. I mean he entered it at 17, just coming out of high school. People just don't do that. And he was incredible as an athlete. He was by his own account this cocky and arrogant top-of-the-world athlete when back in 2003 he was charged with sexual assault. And almost instantaneously he went from being a world class athlete to a potential convicted rapist. He was dropped from all of his lucrative endorsements, he seriously faced the possibility of prison, his wife filed for divorce. Well, eventually the charges were dropped and he settled with the young lady in a civil suit. But it brought him to a place of crisis where he just might have been able to hear the great physician say that he, like all of us, was sick. And so his life took a profound turn from that incident and he set about healing his marriage and focusing on his family with the same intensity that he brought to athletics. And so for the last decade or so he was known as a man who was completely committed to his wife and his four daughters. He died at 9:40 a.m. last Sunday morning California time, that will be 12:40 for us. But at 7:00 a.m. that Sunday, he was somewhere that shocked many, many people. Kobe and his daughter Gigi were actually in church taking communion. And apparently Kobe was a regular attender at mass at his church, often they said -- the parishioners said he used to slip in and slip out so as not to cause a commotion. Just to say, I clearly have big issues, big differences with the Catholic church about communion, about theology and those kind of

things, but having been raised a Catholic my entire life, I know there are many in that system who deeply love Jesus Christ. And my hope that certainly seems to be borne out by the way that the direction of his life changed since that incident is that having met the Great Physician, having received the gift of repentance, that he was able, just like Levi, to turn his life around spiritually. That's the good news behind that awful, awful news.

And so we go back to Mark and we find Levi receiving this same gift of repentance and he has his name changed to Matthew and he becomes the author of the gospel of Matthew. I mean this is a person moving from pond scum to disciple to judge on the throne in heaven itself. And it all starts with a recognition that we, all of us, are sick, that we all need the Great Physician. As the elders begin to pass out the bread, I'd like us to just take a moment to consider the gift of repentance. Ask yourself if you're willing to acknowledge that you and I have a sickness for which there is no cure except a cure offered by Jesus on the cross.

And now we want to consider the warning that God gives about communion. He says this in *1 Corinthians 11*, he says: *But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For*

this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged, but when we are judged we are chastened by the Lord that we may not be condemned with the world. And again I say this each time, I say communion is an extremely serious undertaking and to enter into it in an unworthy manner is to court disaster. Don't do it. Unless you're absolutely confident that you are a child of the King, unless you're absolutely confident that you by faith have trusted in Christ as your Savior, if you first need to be reconciled to your brother or sister before you bring your sacrifice to the altar, don't take it. Get that done first. But on the other hand, I say as well we can make the mistake of thinking unless I'm perfect, unless I'm sinless, I'm unworthy to receive communion. The devil loves that just as much. See, being a child of the King doesn't mean that you don't sin and it doesn't mean that you don't ever fail. It means that you recognize that the salvation that you have is a gift, it's a gift that no one has ever earned by being good. And I repeat this quote again, how apropos today. This is Dane Ortlund. He says: "In the kingdom of God, the one thing that qualifies you is knowing that you don't qualify, and the one thing that disqualifies you is thinking that you do." I go back to Levi. This is exactly what we're looking at. The Pharisees thought they were the most qualified people on earth and they looked at Levi, and they said, if anybody's disqualified, it's him. They had it

perfectly backwards. To repeat, "In the kingdom of God, the one thing that qualifies you is knowing that you don't qualify, and the one thing that disqualifies you is thinking that you do." It also means that when we do fail we are aware that we have sinned and there's a reason for that, because we now have God's Holy Spirit living inside us. It is God's Spirit who convicts us and so we grieve as children knowing we have a Father who longs to forgive and to cleanse us. God says in *1 John 1:9*: *If it we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* So being a child of the King doesn't mean that you are sinless, it means that you know that when you sin, you have an advocate, you have somebody up in heaven itself speaking on your behalf. *1 John 2:1* says: *My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father -- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.* And so because we have Jesus' righteousness now by faith, it's not ours, it's his but it's now belonging to us, and because we have his righteousness, we are now free to eat from his table. And so if you love your Lord, don't deny yourself the privilege that he purchased for you. You know, he lived the life we were supposed to live and then he died the death we all deserved to die in our place so that we could be made worthy of this precise moment, so that we, too, could enjoy the gift of repentance. Just take a moment to contemplate that gift.

1 Corinthians 11:23 says this: For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." So take, and eat.

Well, I said at the beginning of this message that Jesus was at war. He was at war with the enemy and the war never stops. We're going to find that throughout the entire life of Christ. And really what chapter 2 is doing is it's describing three different attacks all produced in the form of a question. So in this next passage in Mark we're going to see a second attack, a second way that the enemy works. He's trying to stir up enmity between John and Jesus' disciples. And once again it comes in the form of a question posed by the Pharisees about the new covenant overtaking the old. This is Mark 2, starting at verse 18. It says: *Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. And people came and said to him -- question two -- "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" And Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day. No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the*

patch tears away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins -- and the wine is destroyed, and so are the skins. But new wine is for fresh wineskins."

Dr. David McKenna points out the brilliance of Christ's response to the Pharisees. And again we need a little bit of background here. If you remember, John the Baptist has been arrested, he's in prison now and John's followers are still practicing the repentance that John's ministry focused on as the precursor to Christ's arrival. Now John's disciples have come face-to-face with Jesus' disciples and they're supposed to be on the same team but yet they're 180 degrees out of phase with each other. The Pharisees have already tried to exploit the differences between separation and holiness with regard to Levi, and we've seen Christ brilliantly deflect it by saying, *"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous but sinners."* And now they're attempting, number two, they're attempting yet another old covenant/new covenant difference they think that they can exploit by asking, *"Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?"* And again, we see Jesus just skewering them by the way he responds to the question. He starts immediately speaking about a wedding, and we might look at that and say, what is that? Well, there's a reason

for Jesus's use of the analogy of a wedding. It's because the exact same analogy was used by John the Baptist previously when he was faced with a difficult report from one of his disciples. And the circumstances were amazingly similar. And it was once again a threat to the unity of different workers in the kingdom. This time it was about baptism and it was genuinely about jealousy. John's gospel describes a meeting that took place between John the Baptist and his disciples over this brand new threat that they found, and the threat was Jesus. He was baptizing, and everybody was going to him. This is *John 3:25*. It says: *Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification. And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness -- look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him." John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.' The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. He must increase, but I must decrease."* So Jesus by using this analogy of the wedding is speaking directly to John's disciples while he is indirectly addressing the Pharisees' question about fasting or not. John had told his disciples who were concerned about Jesus' popularity that he wasn't the bridegroom and

that Jesus in fact was. John said he was only the bridegroom's friend. Again he says: *"You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.' The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. He must increase but I must decrease."* And now Jesus is telling him, "I am the bridegroom." And once again he answers a question with a question: *And Jesus said to him, "Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day."* Jesus, of course, is referring to the time when he will be taken away. He's going to be taken away to the cross. And the time was going to come, and yes, there was going to be a time of mourning and a time of fasting but now, now is a time of joy. And Jesus may well have been referring to an old rabbinical law considering the importance of joy at a wedding. In the old days weddings weren't just a one-day affair. They lasted at least a week. And Dr. McKenna observed that during the week long celebration, rabbis were known to declare that if there was an observation of a law, a particular ceremonial law that came in the way of having a good time during a wedding, then you didn't have to keep that law. And the reason why was because joy was more important than law keeping during the wedding. Then Jesus adds

this other comment. He says: *"No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the patch tears away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. No one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins -- and the wine is destroyed, and so are the skins. But new wine is for fresh wineskins."* Again, Jesus is using two different analogies to describe not just the difficulty but the almost impossibility of trying to force the new covenant into the old. It's pretty obvious that an unshrunk piece of cloth is going to shrink as soon as you put it in the dryer it's going to pull the worn out cloth that it's covering into pieces. I mean similarly the pressure of fermenting wine in a brittle old wineskin is going to rupture it as opposed to putting it into a supple and stretchable new wineskin. Jesus is just pointing out how difficult it is for the old covenant of law to accept Jesus's new covenant of grace.

And attack number three once again takes yet again the form of a question. Jesus has already brilliantly addressed the issue of separation with regard to Levi, the issue of sadness and mourning with a reference to the joy of a wedding, and now Jesus is going to address the old and the new through the third issue, and that's Sabbath keeping. As the elders begin to pass out the cup, let me just read to you from Mark's gospel. This is verse 23. It says:

One Sabbath he was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. And the Pharisees were saying to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" Well, this is exactly what Jesus was referring to. The old covenant of the law simply cannot understand this new covenant of grace. And the Pharisees say, "Look." Actually the Greek is a lot more specific there, they're not just saying, "Hey, I want to show you something," they are pointing out something that they are condemning. It's kind of like we would say, if you were to say, "Oh, would you look at that." I mean clearly they are intensely disapproving on what the disciples are doing. First of all, what they were doing was completely lawful. It was completely allowed by Jewish law. Any Jew was allowed to walk through a field of ripening grain, grab the heads and eat of the grain as long as they didn't put a sickle into the grain, which would be harvesting that which didn't belong to them. But that wasn't the Pharisees' complaint at all. What they were complaining about was plucking the grain and rubbing it with their hands, what they considered to be labor done on the Sabbath.

Baker's New Testament Commentary describes this fiasco this way. He says: The underlying reasoning of the Pharisees was as follows: Was not work forbidden on the sabbath day? Had not the rabbis drawn up a catalog of thirty-nine principal works, subsequently

subdivided into six minor categories under each of these thirty-nine, all of which was forbidden on the sabbath? In accordance with this list was not the plucking of heads of grain reaping? And was not rubbing them with the hands threshing? Here were these disciples engaged in this forbidden activity, and Jesus was doing nothing about it!" Well, once again Jesus answers the question with a question. It says: *And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and he was hungry, he and those who were with him: How he entered the house of God, in the time of Abithar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?"* Jesus again is being historical. He's describing a time when David is on the run from the murderous Saul who was trying to kill him. This is not some idle moment where David was looking for a snack. I mean, David is on the run and he is greatly in need and he is hungry. And so David devises a ruse to get the high priest to give him some bread by telling him that he's on special business for the king when in reality he is running for his life from that same king, King Saul. The bread of the presence was twelve loaves that represented the twelve tribes of Israel, they were laid out on the altar for the week. They represented literally the fellowship that the twelve tribes which Israel had literally at God's table. And at the end of the week the old loaves were replaced with fresh loaves, and the old loaves

were then to be eaten by a priest. Well in this instance the priest readily agrees to give David the bread supposedly set aside only for priests. And he's clearly demonstrating that there were circumstances that called for grace rather than for a strict application of the law. So Jesus again using God's word points out the Pharisees' abuse of the law. And what Jesus is saying is if the law could be abrogated for David, how much more so than for me, because I'm the author of the law itself. He says in verse 28: *"The Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath."* You remember the Sabbath was originally designed as a gift to mankind. It was to be a day of rest. The Pharisees had turned it into a religious test with layers upon layers of rules governing every single aspect of the way you spent that day. The fact that they concluded that simply grabbing a head of grain and rubbing it with your fingers was reaping and threshing and therefore forbidden, that's not only an incorrect understanding of the law, it was also an absurd laying on of burdens that the Pharisees loved to do. So by their phony made-up rules, they turned the point of the Sabbath completely upside down, and Jesus who just happened to be the very God who had invented the Sabbath in the first place as a gift to mankind, he's now in a position to tell the Pharisees who have destroyed that gift and turned it into an onerous burden, that they had everything perfectly backwards. Verse 27: *He said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord*

even of the Sabbath."

So three times we see the Pharisees trying to exploit the differences between the old and the new covenant. On the issue of separation and holiness, Jesus defies them by healing a sin sick Levi through the gift of repentance. On the issue of sadness and mourning, Jesus instructs them by pointing out that the guests at the wedding embrace joy instead of sadness. And on the issue of Sabbath keeping, Jesus rebukes them for turning a gift into a burden. Well, what is our takeaway? See, our takeaway from Jesus's teaching is that we, too, are to reach out to a sin sick world with the only cure that can heal, and that cure is Jesus Christ. And we are to do that by letting the joy of our own individual healing permeate our presentation of the gospel. We are, as has been said, one beggar telling another beggar where bread is to be found. And finally, we are not only forever grateful to God for his gifts that we are also aware that we, too, can turn them into burdens that God never intended when we take evangelical culture and elevate it to the status of commandment. I mean Jesus constantly broke the mold and we, too, have to be aware that we can become moldy and old and ancient and just as attached to our traditions as the Pharisees were attached to theirs. So as you take the cup, ask God to examine you, ask God to examine and see if there be any Philistine, any Pharisee in you.

1 Corinthians, the 11th chapter, verse 25 says: In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." So take, and drink.

This is our head, hands and feet time where we are looking for some practical ways that we can remember Christ and his cross, and so I have a couple of questions. First question is: Do you have a Levi in your life? Do you have a Levi that you are pursuing either literally or in prayer? Somebody who's out there, somebody who is kind of wandering from the fold or just never been near the fold, somebody who is far, far away? We understand Jesus resolutely went after the lost sheep. So the question is do we?

Second question is: Do you have the joy of the wedding feast? Do folks sense in your faith that your faith is something that gives you great joy because Jesus himself is present in your life and he's absolutely real? And thirdly, do you believe in or do you have a set of traditions that can serve as roadblocks to folks getting saved? You see, church is often a very tough place for non-believers. I mean I remember the very first time that I went into a Protestant church. I was a brand new believer, I'd been a believer for about -- you know, I was a hippy, I don't even think I had shoes on, my wife and I. I described the fellow who was my

first spiritual mentor bringing Janice and myself in kind of like by our ears and we're on our tiptoes and he's marching us down the aisle and he's saying, "You're going to church." It was one of the weirdest experiences I ever had. These are really, really weird people in a weird place and they're doing weird things. If it wasn't for the fact they were so warm and gracious and loving, I would have split out of there so fast. And just think about it. What happens when people come into this building? This is our turf. And if you're an unbeliever and you're walking in here, this is a difficult place to be. We have certain rules and traditions that we'd like to think we don't have but we do. And so what happens is people who come in here can instantly sense that there are hoops to jump through in order to get to the truth. So how comfortable are you in welcoming those who have been marginalized? Believe it or not, church is not the ideal place to bring people to Christ. The church really is the place where people who already are believers meet to grow their love for Christ and for each other. And oftentimes this can seem like a completely different world to unbelievers, and that's okay. Usually a better place to share the gospel with a non-believer is either in a coffee shop, over a backyard fence or maybe at your dinner table. I mean Jesus did it at a tax booth with Levi. And so our goal for us today is just to ask God if you don't have a Levi, ask him for one. Ask him for somebody you can be praying specifically for for an opportunity

to share the gospel with them, then seek him or her out either prayerfully or literally just like Jesus did and then make sure that the only thing standing between them and the gospel is the gospel. Let's pray.

Father, I just I thank you for your Son, I thank you for his brilliance, I thank you for his insight. I thank you for how so many times we see him answering questions with questions and you peel apart one layer and there's another layer and underneath that one is another and another and another. His brilliance is beyond comprehension and yet he was humble and walked among us. Father, give us the same understanding that we are people who have been healed of the eternal sickness of sin. And give us the joy of being willing to go out there and find our Levis and share the good news with them, sharing it with people recognizing that we have that joy as well, it's not some obligation but a joy and a privilege to be able to share with others the good news. And finally, Lord, give us the ability to do that in a way that brings honor and glory to you. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.