



Rocking the Boat

Mark 2:18-3:6

1. Fasting (2:18-22)
2. Sabbath (2:23-28)
3. Sabbath (3:1-6)

In 1973, Hues Corporation put out a music album entitled, "Freedom For The Stallion." Two of the songs of the album were released as singles. One of the singles was entitled, "Rock the Boat." Initially, the song appeared to flop. However, it quickly became a disco/club favorite in New York. And in July of 1974, it was the #1 song in the nation. [\[1\]](#) As I child, I remember hearing this song on many occasions.

The song gives a snippet of a relationship using the imagery of a boat ride. Initially, the relationship went very well.

"Ever since our voyage of love began
your touch has thrilled me like the rush of the wind
and your arms have held me safe from a rolling sea
there's always been a quiet place to harbor you and me

Our love is like a ship on the ocean
We've been sailing with a cargo full of, love and devotion."

Yet, like all relationships in songs, this relationship faced some major difficulties. Thus, the refrain, ..

"So I'd like to know where, you got the notion
said I'd like to know where, you got the notion, ...

To rock the boat, don't rock the boat baby
rock the boat, don't tip the boat over
rock the boat, don't rock the boat baby
rock the boat-t-t-t-t."

The plea of the song is keep the ship afloat. "Don't tip the boat over." "Don't tip our relationship." "Don't sink the boat." "Let's restore this relationship back to where it was."

My message this morning is entitled, "Rocking the Boat." My text is Mark 2:18-3:6. This is what we see Jesus doing in our text -- He is rocking the boat. Jesus is upsetting the religious establishment of the day. And those in the boat are not very happy. Had the Hues Corporation existed in the days of Jesus, the Pharisees could easily have sung this song to Jesus.

"So we'd like to know where, you got the notion
said we'd like to know where, you got the notion, ...

To rock the boat, don't rock the boat baby
rock the boat, don't tip the boat over
rock the boat, don't rock the boat baby
rock the boat-t-t-t-t."

You see, early in the ministry of Jesus, things were going well. All was great. The people adored Him (Mark 1:22). The people were amazed at Him (Mark 1:27). The crowds were following after Him (Mark 1:37). They were bringing all who were ill to Jesus and He was healing them all (Mark 1:32). Perhaps you remember my message a few weeks back. I called this "the honeymoon stage" in the ministry of Jesus -- when all is well; when the people are enthralled with Jesus; when He could do no wrong in their eyes.

And yet, things quickly began taking a turn for the worse when Jesus began to reveal who He was. They started taking this turn in chapter 2, which we looked at last week. We saw two stories in which the religious establishment of the day began to turn on Jesus. Jesus was doing good things, and the Pharisees turned them into bad things.

When Jesus healed the paralytic and revealed His authority to forgive sins, the Pharisees called it blasphemy. When Jesus ate with the sinners and revealed His purpose in seeking the sick and needy, the Pharisees questioned His activity. This morning, we are going to see the pressure continue to mount. We will see the hostility mount as Jesus continues to "rock the boat."

We have three stories that we will look at today. Each of them have to do with some aspect of deeply ingrained religious practice. In each of them, Jesus progressively reveals who He is. When Jesus exposes His way, the religious of the day hate it.

We are headed for chapter 3, verse 6. In fact, that's where I want to start this morning, as this verse helps to place these stories in their greater context.

Mark 3:6

The Pharisees went out and immediately began conspiring with the Herodians against Him, as to how they might destroy Him.

This is a shocking verse. The Pharisees and the Herodians were far from friends. The Pharisees and the Herodians were on the opposite ends of the religious spectrum. The Pharisees and the Herodians were on the opposite ends of the political spectrum. Think Republican and Democrat. Think extremes. Think conservative Republican and liberal Democrat.

The Pharisees belonged to the conservative sect of Judaism who sought to worship God according to the tradition of their forefathers. They were very strict in their religious observances. They were very separatist in their practice. They quickly separated themselves from others who didn't hold to their teaching.

The Herodians, on the other hand, were a bit more liberal. Rather than holding to their religion, they were pragmatic, and thought it best for their welfare to submit themselves to the Herods and support the government. They willingly bent for the sake of peace with the Romans. The Pharisees thought that this was a compromise.

And so, they each found themselves on opposite ends of the political spectrum and couldn't unite on anything -- until Jesus came along. Then, they found unity in opposing Jesus and seeking together "how they might destroy Him."

Jesus was rocking the boat, and they didn't like it. The Pharisees didn't like it because Jesus was confronting their religious system. The Herodians didn't like it, because His presence could bring in some political turmoil. And so, they united against a common enemy. And this isn't a common thing. But, when there's a common enemy, those who are otherwise enemies will easily unite in the cause.

It's a bit like the days of the cold war. When Russia was a super-power and communism was the enemy, both Republican and Democrat were entirely united in the war. Republicans and Democrats may have fought over domestic issues, but on national policy, there was unity. Both sides agreed that Russia must be opposed.

It's a bit like the days after September 11th, when the World Trade Center towers came down. There was a common enemy. Republicans and Democrats were together on Capitol Hill singing, "God Bless America."

But, it takes something big to unite enemies. And Jesus was big. They perceived Jesus to be a threat to the entire fabric of their religious system. They perceived Jesus to be a threat to the safety of the Jewish people as a whole.

And so, how was Jesus "Rocking the Boat"? The first instance is found in verse 18. Jesus rocked their boat regarding the issue of ...

1. Fasting (2:18-22)

Mark 2:18

John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting; and they came and said to Him, "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?"

The Pharisees were devoted to their fasting. They fasted twice a week (Luke 18:12), every Monday and every Thursday from sun up (at 6am) to sun down (at 6pm). It was a part of their rhythm of life. Saturdays were spent at the synagogue. Mondays and Thursdays were fasting days. Fasting was a part of their religion. It was a way in which they sought to please the Lord!

Typical to the Pharisee way of life, this was far above and beyond the law, which prescribed fasting only one day out of the year on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29), which was a day of sorrow for sin. But, the Pharisees had regulated their fasting practices to go above and beyond the law. This was their practice. This was their religion. This was their tradition. They held to it very firmly.

We aren't surprised at all to see John's disciples fasting, either. John was an ascetic, who lived in the wilderness under harsh conditions. It would only be natural for him to put his body through the rigors of fasting. It would only be natural for him to teach his disciples to follow in the ways of righteousness.

I would not be surprised if the disciples of John the Baptist followed the exact same process as the Pharisees did. After all, fasting like this was the way that the really religious people lived in the days of Jesus. John's disciples were Old Testament saints, who came from such groups as the Pharisees and Sadducees and Herodians and Essenes. The only difference between the disciples of John and the Pharisees was that they had repented of their sins and were expecting soon the arrival of the Messiah. The rigors of their religion were very much the same.

As you look at the text, you can guess that these events occurred either on Monday or on Thursday. Why do you say this? "John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting" (Mark 2:18). I believe that they were fasting at the exact same moment that Jesus was feasting with the sinners and tax collectors. And they wanted to know why. They wanted to know why they were keeping their bellies empty, while Jesus was

filling His up! Thus, the question of verse 18.

Typical Jesus, He answered a question with a question.

Mark 2:19a

And Jesus said to them, "While the bridegroom is with them, the attendants of the bridegroom cannot fast, can they?"

And then, he goes on to explain his question.

Mark 2:19b-20

So long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast.

Jesus said, "Picture a wedding." A wedding is a time of joy and celebration. A wedding is a time of feasting and merry-making. In fact, this is the thing that I like most about weddings; they are times of great joy. Everybody is happy. A man and a woman have been planning this event for months. All of the guests have arrived. The festivities have begun. It's now time to enjoy the party. That's the last time that you would want to institute a fast, isn't it?

And Jesus is saying that it would be totally inappropriate for His disciples to fast, because Jesus, the bridegroom was still with them. Remember Mark 1:15, and the message of Jesus, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; Repent and believe in the gospel." The kingdom of God was at hand, because Jesus, the King, was present in Galilee. The bridegroom was among them. There was no need to fast.

Again, we see Jesus slowly revealing who He is. He is the bridegroom. This has allusions to the images that Paul would use in Ephesians, chapter 5, of Christ and the church. It has allusions also to the end of time and the marriage supper of the Lamb. But, nobody understood this.

His presence is capable of changing the entire religious practice of the day. Think about the audacity of this claim: "When I am around, there is no reason for you to fast." That's claiming authority. That's rubbing against the long-held tradition of the elders. That's setting Himself above the Jews of the day. That's setting Himself above all of the esteemed Rabbis in the past! He is "Rocking the Boat."

Now, it's not that Jesus was opposed to fasting.

Mark 2:20

But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day.

When the bridegroom leaves, fasting will again be appropriate. But not when Jesus was with them.

And here, we get a bit of an insight on the manner and purpose of fasting. Fasting isn't appropriate for times of joy and on days of good news. Fasting is appropriate for times of sorrow. That's why Israel was called to fast on the Day of Atonement. It was a day of sorrow, when they remembered their sins.

Fasting is for days of sorrow. Fasting is for days of repentance. Fasting is for days of difficulty. Fasting is for days of desperation.

When Esther was planning to go and see the king, and plead for the safety of the Jews, she told Mordecai, "Go, assemble all the Jews who are found in Susa, and fast for me; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens also will fast in the same way. And thus I will go in to the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish" (Esther 4:16).

When Nineveh was told that they were going to be destroyed in 40 days, the king of Nineveh issued a decree, "In Nineveh, by the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water. But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; And let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands" (Jonah 3:7-8).

Fasting is for the days when you lose your job, and you are desperately seeking the Lord for provision for your family. Fasting is for the days when your prodigal son is in a faraway land, and you are seeking the Lord, pleading that He would turn his heart back. Fasting is for the days when your marriage is in shambles, and you are longing for your spouse to turn from sin and back to you. Fasting is for the days of ministry preparation, when you are seeking the extra-ordinary blessing of the Lord. We see this in Acts 13:2, when they were, "ministering to the Lord and fasting," seeking direction from Him. From there, God launched the missionary movement of the church.

Jesus didn't oppose fasting. He only opposed the way in which people fasted. But, He didn't oppose people fasting.

In fact, in the Sermon on the Mount, He told us how to fast, ...

Matthew 6:16-18

"Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

And the Pharisees shouldn't have been ignorant of these things. Isaiah 58 addresses fasting with much the same spirit.

Notice, again in verse 20, how it will be that the bridegroom will leave. He will be "taken away." This word carries the idea of being removed by another, against your will. Unknown to the original hearers, Jesus was certainly alluding here to His death, when Jesus would be delivered into the hands of men; when Jesus would be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes; when Jesus would be condemned to death; when Jesus would be mocked and spit on and scourged; when Jesus would be killed. In that day, fasting will be appropriate, when Jesus is in the grave.

But, Jesus rose from the dead, promising to be with us always. Let us remember that we live in a new day. Because of the death, burial, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, and faith in Jesus, our sins are forgiven. As Paul says in Colossians 2:13, Jesus has "forgiven us all our transgressions." Because of the coming of Christ, much has changed! The modus operandi will be different! Jesus is getting at the change in verses 21 and 22, ...

Mark 2:21-22

"No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; otherwise the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear results. No one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost and the skins as well; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins."

It's a simple picture. You use new patches with new garments and old patches with old garments. You use new wine skins with new wine and old wine skins with old wine. Otherwise, disaster results. The improperly used wineskin will rip, break, or tear.

The picture is simple, but the interpretation of these words are a bit more difficult. I think it best to take these words as describing the changes that Jesus has brought to us. He has brought to us the "New Covenant." He has brought to us the "New way" to God, through faith in Him.

To spend a life of sorrow and sadness in serving Christ misses the point today. We serve a risen savior, which gives us joy and hope. There are sorrows in this world, and reasons to fast, to be sure. But, those are the sub-plots of our lives. The major plot of our life is that we have been redeemed!

So when it comes to fasting, there's no need to have the sort of fasting that the Pharisees practiced. The life of the ascetic, with its self-inflicted hardships and constant fasting, isn't so needed today (unless, of course, the circumstances of your life are filled with tragedy).

And you can't mix the ways of Jesus with the ways of the Old Covenant. If you do, disaster will strike. A worse tear will result. Wine will spill all over the place. This rocked their boat of their long-standing religious convictions.

Let's turn our attention now to our second story. The first story dealt with Fasting (2:18-22) -- "I am the bridegroom. While I'm around there's no need to fast." This second story has to do with the ...

2. Sabbath (2:23-28)

Mark 2:23

And it happened that He was passing through the grainfields on the Sabbath, and His disciples began to make their way along while picking the heads of grain.

It appears at this point as if there is a break in time from our previous story. It is Saturday now. Jesus and His disciples were walking from one place to another. It's what they did. They were a travelling group. Jesus would teach them along the way, in this roving classroom.

As they came upon the grainfield, the disciples were hungry. So they picked a few heads of grain, rubbed the grain in their hands, letting the chaff fall to the ground, and they ate the grain. Raw grain is not the most appetizing of foods, but sufficient to help satisfy their hunger pangs.

This activity was permitted in the law. Deuteronomy 23:25 says, "When you enter your neighbor's standing grain, then you may pluck the heads with your hand, but you shall not wield a sickle in your neighbor's standing grain." In other words, if you were hungry and were walking by your neighbor's field, you could pick some grain and have a bite. You just couldn't pull out your sickle and start placing the grain in your bag for later. You had to eat it there.

A few weeks ago, I went to the Desiring God Pastor's Conference in Minneapolis. The information table had this giant bowl of candy breath mints. Anybody walking by that table was free to take a piece of candy, which was fine. It is what the candy was there for in the first place. But, they didn't want you to take a few handfuls and fill up your backpack with candy to share with the kids when you got home. That wasn't the purpose of the candy.

So, likewise, when there's standing grain in the field, the law said that you can take what you need for the moment with your bare hands. But, you weren't to harvest the field for your later use. Everything that the disciples did was legal according to the law.

Yet, we find the Pharisees finding fault with Jesus. Verse 24, ...

Mark 2:24

The Pharisees were saying to Him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?"

The law spoke nothing about prohibiting these things on the Sabbath. The law only permitted the picking of grain. But, according to the Pharisaical tradition, this wasn't allowed. You see, the Pharisees had developed this code of ethics to determine what you could and couldn't do on the Sabbath. After all, they reasoned, merely a command to rest and cease from work left a lot of room for interpretation. So, they codified what activities were prohibited on the Sabbath.

The Talmud lists 39 activities that were prohibited on the Sabbath:

You couldn't (1) plant.

You couldn't (2) plow.

You couldn't (3) reap or (4) gather or (5) extract or (6) winnow.

You couldn't (7) sort or (8) grind or (9) sift or (10) kneed or (11) cook.

You couldn't (12) shear or (13) launder or (14) beat or (15) dye or (16) spin things like wool.

You couldn't (17) warp or (18) make two loops or (19) weave or (20) separate threads

You couldn't (21) tie or (22) untie.

You couldn't (23) sew or (24) tear or (25) trap or (26) slaughter.

No (27) skinning or (28) curing or (29) smoothing or (30) scoring.

No (31) cutting or (32) writing or (33) erasing.

You couldn't (34) build.

You couldn't (35) demolish.

You couldn't (36) ignite a fire or (37) extinguish a fire.

You couldn't (38) apply the finishing touch or (39) transfer between domains. [\[2\]](#)

The Sabbath was a day of rest, and they made sure that you rested. When the disciples picked the heads of grain, they were reaping, gathering, extracting and winnowing. They were guilty of doing four of the prohibited activities on the Sabbath. And the Pharisees, being sticklers about keeping the law themselves (and being sticklers about others keeping the law), pointed this out to Jesus. "Why are they breaking the Sabbath in this way?"

At this point, Jesus had a choice. He could succumb to the Sabbath teaching of the day or He could justify His disciples' action. Jesus chose to do the latter. Jesus appealed to the Scripture. Here's what He said, ...

Mark 2:25-26

And He said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he was in need and he and his companions became hungry; how he entered the house of God in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the consecrated bread, which is not lawful for anyone to eat except the priests, and he also gave it to those who were with him?"

Jesus goes back into the Old Testament, and tells this story recorded in 1 Samuel 21. David was on the run, fleeing from Saul, who was seeking to kill Him. As He left in haste, without time to prepare his departure, he was unprepared. And as He came to Nob, he had a discussion with the priest, about getting some supplies for him and the few men who were with him. He was in need of food. But, the priest said to David, "There is no ordinary bread on hand, but there is consecrated bread" (1 Sam. 21:4). This was the bread that was prepared by the priests and placed in the tabernacle each week, as holy to the Lord. At the end of the week, only the priests were to eat the bread (Lev. 24:5-9). But, as David and his men came into the tabernacle, they were both hungry and in need of food (Mark 2:25). And so, the priests gave David and his men the sacred bread to eat. [\[3\]](#)

Jesus said, "There is a parallel here. David and His men did an unlawful thing in time of their need. Nowhere does the Scripture ever condemn them for doing so. The need justified the action. My men have a need as well. Surely, there is a higher law than the Sabbath. If we are hungry, we are certainly able to pick a bit of grain and eat it on the Sabbath. Mercy and love should rule the day."

And then, Jesus sets before them the key principle in all Sabbath keeping.

Mark 2:27

Jesus said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath."

In other words, it's not that God created the Sabbath and said, "OK, now that I have this day, we need people to keep this day holy. We need people who will do nothing but rest on this day. They won't plant or plow or reap or gather on this day. Won't this be great?"

No, that's not the way that it happened. Rather, it was like this. God created man and knew that He needed rest. So, He ordained the Sabbath day as a day of rest and rejuvenation, so as to be able to work on the other six days of the week.

We aren't robots. We can't work 24 hours a day. We need our daily rest. But, we also need our weekly rest. We need one day in seven to rest, so as to be able to have the strength to work the other six days. And those who work for more than seven days in a row will feel the strain on their bodies, just like the one who stays up all night to work on a project of some type. Lack of rest will catch up to you.

The Sabbath day should be a help to you. The Sabbath day should be a delight. Instead, the Sabbath day had been turned into a burden, with rules upon rules. "The Sabbath was made [to help] man."

Then, verse 28 is the kicker. It's where Jesus reveals a bit more about Himself. He says, ...

Mark 2:28
So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

In other words, "All of your Sabbath laws must bow to Me! I am the Lord of the Sabbath. I make the rules for what is Sabbath-keeping. I make the rules for what is Sabbath-breaking. When we have a need, we can eat a little grain!"

Such is the authority of Jesus. He can stand against hundreds of years of traditions! He can stand against the Talmud. He can stand against all of the Rabbis of the past. He stands above them all.

The religious leaders didn't like the way that Jesus was "rocking the boat." Regarding the practice of fasting (2:18-22), Jesus claimed a new rule in town. Regarding the practice of Sabbath keeping (2:23-28), Jesus claimed to be the Lord of the Sabbath. Let's turn our attention to one last event, it's found in the first five verses of chapter 3. Again, it has to do with the issue of the ...
3. Sabbath (3:1-6)

We read in verse 1, ...

Mark 3:1
He entered again into a synagogue; and a man was there whose hand was withered.

This may have been the same day. Or, it may have been another day (as the NIV seems to indicate). We really don't know. We see Jesus entering into the synagogue, perhaps in Capernaum. There was a man in the synagogue with a withered hand. Luke tells us that it was his "right" hand (Luke 6:6). We read in verse 2, ...

Mark 3:2
They were watching Him to see if He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him.

What is remarkable here is that there no doubt in anybody's mind that Jesus had the power to heal. There is no doubt whatsoever, that Jesus can heal a man with a withered-up hand! Jesus had proven Himself again and again and again to have such power. The question on the table is whether or not Jesus will heal today -- on the Sabbath. And the Pharisees were intent upon discovering whether or not Jesus would do such a thing. Because, they were ready to accuse Jesus as being a Sabbath-breaker!

Again, Jesus had the decision placed before Him. He could let it pass with this man. Or, Jesus could instruct this man to come back tomorrow, when He would heal him, which would surely cause a controversy. Or, Jesus could "rock the boat."

Of course, you know what Jesus did. He decided to "rock the boat."

Mark 3:3-4
He said to the man with the withered hand, "Get up and come forward!" And He said to them, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to kill?" But they kept silent.

Jesus brings the man in front of everyone. And again, Jesus asks a clarifying question. Jesus asked a question in each story we have looked at this morning. In Mark 2:19, "And Jesus said to them, 'While the bridegroom is with them, the attendants of the bridegroom cannot fast, can they?'" And in Mark 2:25, "And He said to them, 'Have you never read what David did when he was in need and he and his companions became hungry;'"

Here's the clarifying question now: "Is it lawful to do good ... on the Sabbath?" I trust that you see the irony here. Jesus is among them, doing great things. And they want to accuse Him on a technicality of their law. The Pharisees had so distorted the purpose of the Sabbath that they refused to answer the question. In their minds, the Sabbath was all about religious observances. It was all about keeping the law.

They had missed the true purpose of the Sabbath. God instituted the Sabbath for our benefit. God instituted the Sabbath for our good. The Sabbath is for regaining our strength. The Sabbath is for resting, that we might run. The Sabbath is to help us work.

Tim Keller said it very well. "The Sabbath is about restoring the diminished. It's about replenishing the drained. It's about repairing the broken. To heal the man's shriveled hand is to do exactly what the Sabbath is all about. Yet because the leaders are so concerned that Sabbath regulations be observed, they don't want Jesus to heal this man--an incredible example of missing the forest for the trees. Their hearts are as shriveled as the man's hand." [\[4\]](#)

Mark 3:5a
After looking around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand."
And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored.

This is the heart of these three stories. Jesus is bringing such joy to His disciples that there was no longer a need to fast in His presence. But, the Pharisees wanted to keep the gloomy in their religion. The little bit of granola that the disciples were eating was giving them the energy to learn from Jesus, that they might serve others. But, the Pharisees wanted to shut this down also, preferring His disciples to go hungry. And now, here was a man with a withered hand, unable to tie his sandals or button his clothes or do a host of other things. But, the Pharisees

couldn't see the good that Jesus was doing. They were ready to accuse Him.

Rightly so was Jesus angry. Rightly so was Jesus angry at their hardness of heart! Psalm 103:8 says that the LORD is "slow to anger". Still, these 5 episodes had caused Him to be angry at their hardness of heart. They had not understood God's heart. God desires mercy, not sacrifice (Hosea 6:6)! God is more concerned with the well-being of people than He is with keeping a religious code of ethics. Aren't you glad?

That's why God calls us to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. That's why God calls us to love our neighbor as ourselves. That's why the over-riding characteristic of Rock Valley Bible Church ought to be love. Yes, God's Word. Yes, doctrine. Yes, and emphasis upon the Bible. Let these things work themselves out in love.

And lest you think that this was just them, oh, Rock Valley Bible Church. Know that we can be like the Pharisees. We can be so intent upon our religious practices that we miss the opportunities to show love and do good. We can be so intent upon our methods that we miss the reasons for our methods. We can be so intent upon our theology that we miss love toward others. Love God with all your heart. Love your neighbor as yourself.

Jesus showed love to this man.

Mark 3:5b

He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored.

With this healing, Jesus had "rocked their boat" and they were now ready to destroy Him. The case was closed. Jesus needed to be removed. He was too much of a threat. The honeymoon was over.

Mark 3:6

The Pharisees went out and immediately began conspiring with the Herodians against Him, as to how they might destroy Him.

What sort of a threat was Jesus? Jesus was a threat to their religion. Jesus was a threat to their power. And, to them, their power was more important than God's work.

Fundamentally, I believe that the problem the Pharisees had was one of religion. Their religious practices were everything to them. They believed that they were the key to getting to God. They didn't realize that God was right there before them. They didn't need to do anything to get to God. They merely needed to respond to Jesus. Instead, their religion was actually against Jesus.

They thought that their obedience to the law was the key to pleasing God and being accepted by Him. This is the tendency of our hearts as well. We will tend to think that God looks down at our obedience and accepts us because we are good. But, this isn't the gospel!

The good news is that we are accepted by faith in Jesus. Psalm 103:8-10 say, "The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness. He will not always strive with us, nor will He keep His anger forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities."

Therefore, we respond in love. It changes the flavor of our law-keeping. No longer do we try to maintain the letter of every law. We look to apply the spirit of the law in every circumstance. We always ask, "What is the loving thing to do?" The law ought to guide us in answering this question.

Tim Keller writes,

Most people in the world believe that if there is a God, you relate to God by being good. Most religions are based on that principle, though there are a million different variations on it. Some religions are what you might call nationalistic: You connect to God, they say, by coming into our people group and taking on the markers of society membership. Other religions are spiritualistic: You reach God by working your way through certain transformations of consciousness. Yet other religions are legalistic: There's a code of conduct, and if you follow it God will look upon you with favor. But they have the same logic: If I perform, if I obey, I'm accepted. The gospel of Jesus is not only different from that but diametrically opposed to it: I'm fully accepted in Jesus Christ, and therefore I obey. ...

In religion the purpose of obeying the law is to assure you that you're all right with God. As a result, when you come to the law, what you're most concerned about is detail. You want to know exactly what you've got to do, because you have to push all the right buttons. You won't gravitate toward seeking out the intent of the law; rather, you'll tend to write into the law all sorts of details of observance so you can assure yourself that you're obeying it. But in the life of Christians the law of God--though still binding on them--functions in a completely different way. It shows you the life of love you want to live before the God who has done so much for you. God's law takes you out of yourself; it shows you how to serve God and others instead of being absorbed with yourself. You study and obey the law of God in order to discover the kind of life you should live in order to please and resemble the one who created and redeemed you, delivering you from the consequences of sin. And you don't violate it or whittle it down to manageable proportions by adding man-made details to it. [\[5\]](#)

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on February 19, 2012 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rock_the_Boat_\(Hues_Corporation_song\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rock_the_Boat_(Hues_Corporation_song))

[2] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Activities_prohibited_on_Shabbat

[3] For the one who actually looked up the reference to which Jesus was referring (1 Samuel 21), you will have noticed that the names of the priests are different. Jesus mentions Abiathar the high priest, whereas 1 Samuel 21:1ff calls the priest Ahimelech (the father of Abiathar). Those who deny the inerrancy of the Bible will be quick to point this out here as an example of a contradiction in the Bible. But, such a view isn't demanded. To be sure, it is a difficult problem. Perhaps the best solution is to understand Jesus to be saying that these things took place during the general time when Abiathar was high priest. Such a general time frame would encompass the time when Ahimelech was high priest as well.

Admittedly, this solution is not without its problems. J. A. Alexander commented, "It is best, however, as in all such cases, to leave the discrepancy unsolved rather than to solve it by unnatural and forced constructions. A difficulty may admit of explanation, although we may not be able to explain it, and the multitude of cases in which riddles once esteemed insoluble have since been satisfactorily settled, should encourage us to hope for like results in other cases" (Commentary on the Gospel of Mark, p. 54).

[4] Timothy Keller, "King's Cross", pp. 38-39.

[5] Ibid. pp. 39, 41.