

1. The Importance of Forgiveness Mark 2: 1-12

The greatest need a person has in their life as they near death, is forgiveness. Even while we are sick, thoughts trouble us- that maybe because of my sin I am being punished by God. The paralyzed man seemed as though he needed physical healing. When he was brought to Jesus, the greater need was met. Jesus forgave his sins. Forgiveness means dismissing a debt. Forgiveness is dismissing your demand that others owe you something. Forgiveness is setting someone free from the consequences of failing. Forgiveness is not waiting for time to heal our wounds. Forgiveness is not the same as reconciliation – it takes two to reconcile but only one to forgive. Forgiveness is not explaining about the hurt, but working through the hurt. Forgiveness is not stuffing your anger but rather releasing your offense to God. Forgiveness is not a natural response, but a supernatural response. That is why, without Jesus' example in our life, we wouldn't fully understand forgiveness. When we see people suffering, one of the first questions we should ask is 'Have they been forgiven by Jesus?'

2. The Importance of the Call Mark 2: 13-17

Jesus called Levi, also known as Matthew, to follow him. Matthew got up, left everything and followed Jesus. It seems Matthew organized a dinner at his place, where many tax collectors and sinners were eating. The teachers of the law were also present. They asked his disciples "Why does [Jesus] eat with Tax collectors and 'sinners'?" Jesus replied, that he had come to call the sinners, and not the righteous. The call of Jesus is for everyone. Sinners listen and respond but the arrogant either fail to listen or listen and don't respond. We became disciples when we listened to the call and responded. We will remain disciples when we keep listening to the call and responding. The act of listening and responding is called humility. It takes humility to listen to somebody else and respond with all our heart. When we stop being humble, we start getting sick spiritually. Let's decide to keep the call important.

3. The Importance of Fasting Mark 2: 18-20

John's disciples, as well as the Pharisees, were fasting. At that moment, Jesus' disciples were not. When questioned, Jesus answered that there will be a time when his disciples will fast. Fasting simply means to give up food. As disciples, we should fast. (Have you ever fasted? How was it?) In the Kingdom, we usually do a twenty four hour fast. So, if we had dinner last night, then we don't eat this whole day and have breakfast tomorrow. (Ask them which day they are going to fast. You can encourage them to have tea or water, but when they feel hungry, to really think about why they are fasting. It could be to change a character or become fruitful)

4. The Importance of New Wineskins Mark 2: 21-22

Though there are subtle differences in the parable of the garment and the wineskins they almost convey the same message. In the olden days, people used to store wine in wineskins. Upon fermentation, the wineskins would expand. This would stretch the wineskins. If again new wine was poured into the same wineskin, it would stretch even more and break. So to preserve the new wine, they would only pour it in new wineskins. Here, the new wine is Jesus Christ and his teaching. People are the wineskins. The Pharisees (Old wineskin) could not understand Jesus' teaching (New wine) because they were filled with their own traditions. In order for them to accept Jesus' teaching, they had to become new wineskins. In order to become new wineskins, they had to throw out their traditions and customs and listen to Jesus' teaching, which was the word of God. There is a lesson for us to learn over here. Sometimes, to accept Jesus' teaching we have to become a new wineskin. This would mean to be humble before God and start with the attitude 'I am nothing and God has made me an awesome nobody'. Let's decide to remain a New Wineskin always.

5. The Importance of Sabbath Mark 2: 23-28

The Pharisees complained that Jesus' disciples were breaking the Sabbath. What is the Sabbath? It was a day of rest where the Israelites refrained themselves from work and dedicated that day to worship God. The Jews had made their own laws about Sabbath. Any form of work was disallowed. For example, if one was walking and the slipper carried a nail, it was breaking the Sabbath. Even today, they have Sabbath elevators in hotels in Israel. You don't have to press any button, the lift stops at every floor.

Well, the Israelites were so carried away by their rules and regulations, that they forgot the heart of God. Here, Jesus gives an example of King David, who did break the Law. Firstly, he entered the house of God which he is not supposed to. Secondly, he ate the consecrated bread which was lawful only for the priest to eat. But God did not punish King David. David's men were hungry and he thought about feeding his people food. Jesus' point was that the intention of what God said is sometimes more important than what God is saying. Which meant that some laws superseded others. David's physical need was more important than mere ritual observance. The law was meant to benefit people, not to control or condemn them.

Last month, we had the challenge of giving up WhatsApp, Facebook, internet and movies. For some of us who want to find a loophole in the law, we'd say "you never said t.v. serials, so I'm watching them." On the other hand, we may have some disciples who may hold too rigidly to the law by not checking and replying to their important emails, saying that you said no internet. The actual question we have to ask is, "what was the purpose of not watching fb, movies etc." It was to keep ourselves from distractions and time eaters. The one who's watching t.v. serials never understood the spirit behind what was said. Neither did the one not replying to

important emails. So when we hear an instruction from the leader, let's understand the intention behind it, rather than blindly follow it.