

# No Turning Back

## Living the surrendered life

### Lesson 2

Here we are... another autumn. I love the autumn. But there's this lurking reminder in my brain that knows of the gray days of winter's coming. What I really hate most about winter is the lack of light. I like the Sun. I love the long days of summer. But as much as I love light, I don't always love it. How do you feel about sunshine when you're trying to sleep and it shines right in your eyes?

**Sometimes, the light isn't welcome.** Caedmon's Call expresses some interesting words about light in their song "Too Tender"— "I stumbled upon the truth, I wish it get out of my way. When I see the light I pull down the shades."

**Sometimes, the light isn't welcome.** In Jesus, the brilliance of God's glory was blazing in this dark world. Heavenly sunlight was flooding the land. ...but not everybody loved Heaven's light.

And we're not really surprised by this are we? You remember in the first lesson of this series when Jesus is baptized and then is lead into the wilderness for 40 days. And we see Jesus and Satan going at it. And all of this probably surprises nobody. There's no real news here. **This is Mark, chapter one.**

**Mark chapter two** is really where the surprise is. The wilderness for Jesus proves to be the least of his problems. Jesus' opposition came not from the secular arena, but rather came from the religious community that Jesus knew so well. This was a religious community that had God's word for centuries. This was a religious community that had priests, prophets and the Temple. Have you ever thought through that? The center of opposition came from the religious world – and specifically from the religious leadership. The opposition and resistance came from those who should have known better and those who should have recognized the Messiah!

**Jesus came shining God's light.** Mark 2:1-5 He heals a paralyzed man, and forgives his sins. And what is the response of these religious leaders?! **6Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, 7"Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"**

**Jesus came shining God's light** and he's found eating with tax collectors and with other "sinners" and these religious leaders condemn him for it. **The New Living Translation (v.16) : "Why does He eat with such scum?"**

But look at what this Jesus who has a tiger in his tank, says. *"Don't sick people need a doctor? Don't the sin-sick need someone to heal them?"* It's so simple, and compelling, but these religious leaders totally miss it.

**Jesus came shining God's light** and then comes the accusation about fasting **"How is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?" (v. 18b)**

God commanded only one fast day each year in the Old Testament. The Day of **Atonement (Lev. 16:29)**. However, the Pharisees made it a law to fast two days per week, Monday and Thursday. It's not wrong in and of itself, to fast twice a week. That could be a good thing. But the Pharisees made it

mandatory, and they used it as a measuring stick of one's righteousness. Those who didn't follow the Pharisees traditions were defamed with the label "Sinners."

Aren't you glad we never do this in the church? Aren't you glad that we do not adopt artificial standards to judge and label people?

**In the past century:**

- Women who wear earrings are obviously wanton women, cheap, tawdry, and vulgar.
- Women who wear make-up or paint their nails are wanton, and loose.
- Christians who play cards or go to the movies are not Christians at all.

**2nd century A.D.:**

A young man asks "I am in earnest about forsaking 'the world' and following Christ. But I am puzzled about worldly things. What is it I must forsake?"... "Colored clothes, for one thing. Get rid of everything in your wardrobe that is not white. Stop sleeping on a soft pillow. Sell your musical instruments and don't eat any more white bread. You cannot, if you are sincere about obeying Christ, take warm baths or shave your beard. To shave is to lie against Him who created us, to attempt to improve on His Work." It dishonors God.

[Elizabeth Elliot, The Liberty of Obedience, Nashville, Abingdon, 1968, pp. 45-46.](#)

Every generation has had its own man-made religious rules.

**Some modern day made up rules:**

- "At church this month, we're having a revival meeting. If you really love God, and are serious about your faith, you'll be there."
- We're starting an outreach ministry, and if you care at all about lost people and the cause of Christ, you'll be part of it.
- We're starting a benevolent ministry, and if you have any concern for needy people, if your faith means anything to you, if you love God at all, surely, you'll participate.
- We have ladies and men's weekly and monthly bible classes, and if you care about your brothers and sisters, and if you really have a relationship with God you'll be at these meetings.
- Wednesday night bible classes are available for the entire congregation, and if you do not attend then there must be something wrong with one's faith, or there's a lack of maturity or lack of brotherly love for those who don't show up with those who do.

**The problem with Man made rules is**— artificial standards, not God's standards, are used to judge people.

So Jesus explains, "Now's not the time for fasting. But he goes on to say that there would come a time for fasting (when the bridegroom was taken away) – that fasting would be appropriate. Jesus was referring to his arrest and crucifixion.

Jesus goes out of his way to challenge the mindset of traditions and his ministry.

21 "No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse. 22 And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, he pours new wine into new wineskins."

The point: you can't try to squeeze the new wine of Jesus' ministry into the old wineskins of tired traditions. It's incompatible. That dog won't hunt.

**Jesus came shining God's light** and the Pharisees condemn Jesus' disciples for picking some grain to eat on the Sabbath, and they condemn Jesus for healing a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath (Mark 2:23-3:6).

It comes as no surprise that these religious leaders considered it work to pluck a head of grain and separate the edible from the inedible on the Sabbath day-- even though they were hungry. It comes as no surprise that these religious leaders considered it work to do good to another on the Sabbath.

The Sabbath originally was given to restore men and women, to give them rest and recreation. Properly observed, it would be a joy. But the Pharisees had surrounded it with thousands of interpretations of what it meant to cease work --and they had made it a terrible burden to bear.

I like the way the MESSAGE explains this: **27 The Sabbath was made to serve us, we weren't made to serve the Sabbath.** People are not created in the image of God to observe Sabbath; Rest was given as a gift from God. People were created in the image of God to observe God and to imitate God. They were not created to observe or to follow some rule about God. An acquaintance of mine (Jeff Christian) says it this way: **"The Sabbath was made for people, people like you and me, to draw closer to God and to one another, to set aside the fury of our schedules, to let children play in the backyard, to cheer quietly as parents take afternoon naps, to witness families living out a call to emulate God's faithfulness."**

There's often a difference between what God has said, and what somebody says that God said. (God is often misquoted). People often take their own ideas and superimpose God on them to give them weight and authority.

And these Pharisees misunderstood God's intention for the Sabbath - they perverted the Sabbath - they turned a great blessing into an awful burden.

There is no doubt that Jesus' ministry was met with considerable resistance from the religious world. And there's a valuable lesson for us today. The doing of good rarely occurs without opposition. There will almost always be those who resent, and criticize, condemn, and oppose it!

And honestly, I'm not really sure we get this. If we're doing good, and we encounter some resistance--that doesn't mean we should stop doing good! Resistance does not necessarily mean God's giving us a stoplight. Sometimes opposition occurs precisely because we're doing what's right.

The Holy Spirit is active in the world - living in God's people - working out God's holy purposes-- God is doing things. He's active. He's still working in our world and in our lives. And the point is, you can work with Him and for Him-- or you can resist and rebel. I don't ever want to be in a position of opposing God! Do you? It can happen. It has happened. It does happen.

I love the story of the preacher who told his friend "We have a 'working' congregation. Half of 'em are working with me - and half of 'em are working against me." This story is sort of a parable. If we're not vigilant, if we don't pay attention, we can find ourselves **working against God** instead of

working for God.

Listen-- when we're spiritually dull, or spiritually careless, or don't pay attention-- When we're not on the same page as God and we allow sinful pride to take over--we find ourselves resisting God. And that's a problem.

It's a problem because when the **Spirit comes shining God's light**-- When He moves, when he does things, when he brings revival and touches lives, when fresh winds of the Spirit blow... if we're not paying attention, we can, like those religious leaders, call the work of God evil.

I don't ever want to call the works of God evil. But I have to admit I've done it!

- I've done it when I've made harsh and unwarranted judgments against other believers and groups of believers.
- I've done it when I've assumed that those folks over there who do things differently from my preference - surely must do so because they don't really care about God or God's will or God's truth, otherwise they would believe exactly as I believe and practice as I practice!
- I've done it when I've attributed actions of fellow Christians to the worst of motives, rather than giving them the benefit of the doubt -

**When I've acted this way, I have in affect-- resisted God.**

**Let me illustrate more about what I mean:**

- When somebody has a proposal for a ministry idea, are you quick to shoot it down... especially if it doesn't exactly line up with your comfort zone?
  - Here's some food for thought. Maybe your comfort zone doesn't exactly equal the will of God.
  - Here's a brother or sister, who has the Spirit of God living in him/or her. Maybe her ministry idea was prompted by God. Shouldn't we at least give it prayerful consideration? Shouldn't we at least treat it seriously?
- When a Christian looks at a homeless person more with disgust and disdain, than with love and compassion, then that Christian has in affect resisted God.
- When God has prompted you to minister to somebody - to serve somebody who has a need - and you kind of decide to sit back... and wait and let somebody else do it. Then you have in affect resisted God.

I don't want to resist God. Don't find yourself responding to the light by pulling down the shades.

This world of ours is littered with people who need the light Jesus shines.

### **The Preacher**

Another amazing testimony to the power of the gospel resides in a nursing home in Tucker, GA. His wife dead, his only daughter dead, and his body failing after three strokes, Lester still lives with hope. Even with his recent round at the hospital that included a pacemaker, he chooses hope over despair. Though deaf he hears the melody of God's grace.

Lester knows pain and suffering; he also knows the lonely night and the smell of death that always lurks in the corners and hallways of nursing homes. And he will tell you plainly that going home to be with God would be far greater than the quality of living that his broken body now offers to him.

And yet--he believes. And he tells others. Three Sundays each month Lester mounts his wheelchair and makes his way to the makeshift sanctuary of the atrium of that nursing home and preaches. A deaf man preaching the love of God to the broken and the aged, the forsaken and dying. People come and people hear what Lester can no longer hear but still believes. People hear because God is speaking through the brokenness of one man who lives his faith with passion--and with hope. Isn't it just like God to use Lester to sing the melody of grace amongst the grating sounds of a nursing home?

[http://carsonreed.blogspot.com/2005\\_02\\_01\\_carsonreed\\_archive.html](http://carsonreed.blogspot.com/2005_02_01_carsonreed_archive.html)

There are people who see themselves as worthless because they have some kind of mark on them...either self-inflicted or a label slapped on them by someone else. There are other folks who feel that they do not measure up to God's standards, no matter how hard they try...and they are trying really hard. There are people with struggles, and confusion, and they are tired of living quiet lives of desperation. There are people who are worn out because they have tried to live their life by their own power and might.

You see, Jesus comes with the good news. Jesus comes to rescue us all. **Come to me, Jesus says, all who are weary, burdened, and I will give you rest. Follow me. Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls.**

So we move on in this series of lessons. We acknowledge that there's no turning back. The Chelmsford church,--this family is not going to live the way we've always lived. We will not turn back to our old ways. Instead our eyes will be open to **Jesus coming in our lives, shining God's light in a dark world**-- and we will live the surrendered life!

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