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ELKHORN, NEBRASKA
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PASTOR MARK FRY

1 PASTOR MARK FRY: Our text is Mark 2, 13 through
2 22, and I don't want to assume any prior knowledge.

3 I want to look a little bit at Mark 1 with you. We
4 are real early in Mark's Gospel.

5 And Mark doesn't tell us about Jesus's birth or
6 really much about his family of origin.

7 He's a full-grown adult when Mark starts writing
8 his story of Jesus's life.

9 And Jesus is baptized in the first chapter there,
10 Verse 11, a voice comes from heaven, "You are my beloved
11 son. With you I am well pleased," the same voice that was
12 spoken to Rick today; the same voice that is spoken to us.

13 In other words, I love you. You're mine. I'm
14 yours.

15 That's the response of our life, is you're mine and
16 I want to be yours, Lord.

17 Waves tossed in the ocean, flowers that sometimes
18 fade pretty quickly, but it's about a relationship.

19 In the story Jesus is immediately driven out into
20 the wilderness.

21 He's tempted for forty days and he comes back and
22 he's just after it. He's just going at it. He's like he's
23 on the autobahn.

24 He's doing healing, cleansing, and teaching. He's
25 just going berserk.

1 The first thing he says, of course, is that the
2 time is now, the time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God has
3 come.

4 Repent and believe the good news, get after it
5 yourselves, is what he's saying.

6 And then he starts showing the disciples what it
7 looks like.

8 He starts calling them and he's entering the
9 synagogue and teaching with authority, it says down in Verse
10 22, 1st Chapter.

11 Then again in Verse 27, "What is this? A new
12 teaching with authority. He commands even the unclean
13 spirits and they obey him."

14 Jesus is just going berserk and doing all this
15 really cool stuff, because God had spoken his name, and
16 reached down and embraced him from heaven.

17 His fame starts to spread and he's going all over
18 the place.

19 And we notice in Chapter 1, Verse 35, here is how
20 he's able to keep it up.

21 "In the morning, while it was still very dark, he
22 got up and he went out to a deserted place and there he
23 prayed."

24 That's where we get the grace from the Father.
25 Otherwise we get empty.

1 And we don't get it in a pill; we don't get it in a
2 bottle; we don't get it in a building.

3 We get it from the Father, and that's that flow of
4 grace.

5 We go to him and he gives us that strength and that
6 presence to go.

7 And then he comes back, and the second chapter is
8 what we looked at last week and it was really the story of
9 defying gravity.

10 It's these four friends who have a paralyzed friend
11 and they are very creative.

12 They cut a hole in the roof and they lower their
13 friend down into Jesus's presence, because the house is so
14 full of people.

15 And Jesus forgives the guy's sins. He says you are
16 forgiven, get up and take your mat and walk, and the guy
17 does.

18 And I like to call him Matt, because he's getting
19 up and moving, instead of staying sedentary, and he's
20 defying gravity.

21 That's the context. This week I want to talk about
22 who plays the game, where the game is played, and how the
23 game is played.

24 Because we talked last week about how Matt gets
25 into the game.

1 He's given the permission to play. You're sins are
2 forgiven. Go.

3 In other words, get into it, get after it, you are
4 a player now.

5 You are not just a layer, you're not just laying on
6 the mat, you are not just sitting in the bleachers now.

7 You're supposed to get out there and do the same
8 stuff you've seen me do, basically is what Jesus says to his
9 disciples.

10 So that is the context. We are up to that right
11 now and I want to look then closely at that story beginning
12 in the 13th Verse.

13 There is kind of a cool little thing that Mark is
14 talking about right away.

15 Jesus went out again beside the sea. He's kind of
16 being cute in that and what he's teaching us is that Jesus
17 is going fishing, and the best place to catch fish is in the
18 water, but he's not fishing for fish; he's fishing for
19 people.

20 And so he's out beside the sea, teaching, and what
21 we notice then right away is there's a whole crowd gathered
22 around him and he taught them.

23 "As he was walking along he saw Levi, son of
24 Alphaeus, sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him,
25 follow me, and he got up and he followed him."

1 He previously had only been calling fishermen. Now
2 he's calling this guy named Levi.

3 And so there is a creative tension that Mark is
4 telling the story, because I don't know about you, but if I
5 look at my calendar right now, and if I allow myself, I can
6 start feeling a little bit of anxiety over a particular
7 issue that comes every year on April 15th.

8 And I'm thinking, I better get my stuff to Phil,
9 he's my tax guy.

10 Saturday I got the information from my son that
11 told his earnings last year, I kind of help him with his
12 taxes, so I can almost hear that tick-tick-tick thing of get
13 it done, because you're going to be in traffic school this
14 week, and you're going to be busy, and March madness is
15 coming, and you always have stuff when Lent comes around, so
16 you might want to get on Phil's calendar.

17 Phil is my tax guy. Levi is a tax guy. But I
18 really like Phil, and Phil's friends really like him.

19 But Levi is not in that same position in life,
20 because if we look closely at Levi, he's involved in a
21 corrupt system.

22 He's kind of like an IRS guy, and we don't really
23 like those guys real well, but he's an IRS guy.

24 I have a quote about Levi from a Bible journal that
25 I get. He's not a fisherman; he's an IRS guy.

1 "Tax collectors, as the middlemen of the Roman
2 taxation system, were viewed as crooked and unclean. Levi,
3 as an occupant of a tax office, would have been a bottom
4 feeder within that system. As such, he would not have
5 profited like Zacchaeus from the taxation franchise."

6 If we had time we would look at Luke 19, Zacchaeus
7 was a wee little man, a wee little man was he.

8 He was a tax collector, but he was rich, the text
9 says. Levi is not rich.

10 And so this is what the journal says, "He probably
11 would have been a mere employee within such an operation.
12 In this sense, Levi is in double social jeopardy. He's too
13 low in the tax system to benefit from its graft, and yet
14 he's tainted by his association with it."

15 In other words, Levi, he's not supposed to be
16 allowed into the game, but Jesus calls him and says follow
17 me.

18 And here is something really cool that also you
19 need to know.

20 Take your Bible and open to Matthew 9, Verse 9, "As
21 Jesus was walking along he saw a man called Matthew sitting
22 at a tax booth, and he said follow me, and he got up and
23 followed him. And as he sat at dinner in the house, many
24 tax collectors and sinners were sitting with him and his
25 disciples."

1 It's in essence the same story. Matthew, Mark, and
2 Luke tell the same story, but the name changes to protect
3 the innocent.

4 It's Matthew, and his name is also Levi, and you
5 have friends that way, maybe they are called by their middle
6 name.

7 But the guy's name is Levi, and he's also Matthew,
8 but, see, a lot of us look at the list of the twelve
9 disciples and we don't see Levi in the list, because his
10 name is actually Matthew.

11 What has just happened is revolutionary, because
12 Jesus was calling fishermen; now he's calling a white collar
13 guy, and his name is Matthew or Levi.

14 But, see, now he's in the game, and he's going to
15 play the game in different ways.

16 I shared last week that I got my speeding ticket a
17 week ago Thursday, and I wanted you to hear it from me
18 before you hear from all the other people in the area,
19 because our guest from England, of course, he had to
20 announce it at the whole gathering of all the clergy of
21 Douglas County.

22 He mentioned that I had been picked up and it was
23 his highlight of coming to Omaha, was to see the red lights
24 flashing in the rear of my car.

25 I wanted you to hear it from me, and I shared that

1 information last week, and so I'm sitting at home on Monday,
2 the phone rings, Wenda and I are getting ready to watch
3 whatever show we watch on Monday night, The Bachelor.

4 (Laughter)

5 So I was glad the phone rang, and it was a guy from
6 our church who is a police officer, and he just goes,
7 "Hello, offender."

8 (Laughter)

9 And I said, "How did you know?"

10 "Jenny told me."

11 He teaches the traffic class.

12 (Laughter)

13 But he doesn't teach it on the night I have to go.
14 I have to go tomorrow and Tuesday.

15 He's a Wednesday/Thursday guy and I have stuff I
16 have to do on Wednesday and Thursday. So, anyway, I'm an
17 offender.

18 That's who Levi is. He's an offender. But you see
19 where he is? He's in the game now.

20 Jesus doesn't care what we have done, or failed to
21 do.

22 We are called to follow and be in the game. That's
23 who is allowed to play the game.

24 Where is the game played? We see it right away in
25 Verse 15.

1 "And as he sat at dinner in Levi's house, many tax
2 collectors and sinners were also sitting with Jesus and his
3 disciples."

4 This is interesting to me, on a lot of different
5 levels.

6 I don't know if Jesus invited himself. Maybe. Or
7 if Levi invited him.

8 Isn't that cool, to think about the two different
9 ramifications of that?

10 I think it's maybe a little of both. Jesus was
11 famous for doing that.

12 But look at Levi. He's just right away, I'm
13 following you, come to my place and eat.

14 And then the cool thing is he's like the world's
15 first evangelist.

16 He has his friends. You guys have got to meet this
17 Jesus guy. Man, he's something else.

18 And so he goes over to Levi's house and there's
19 other tax collectors and sinners there.

20 That's amazing to me, but here is the thing I want
21 you to gaze into really closely.

22 You'll see then right away the place where the game
23 is played is around the dinner table with other outcasts,
24 other tax collectors, taxpayers, sinners and saints, other
25 offenders.

1 But here is the thing that is interesting to me.
2 When I look at that verse very closely, Verse 16, "When the
3 scribes of the Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners
4 and tax collectors, they said to his disciples, "Why does he
5 eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

6 If you notice, there is a little footnote right by
7 the word eat.

8 The original text says, "Why does he eat and drink
9 with sinners and tax collectors?"

10 Isn't that interesting? Some people have
11 conveniently gotten that out of there.

12 Jesus was accused of being a glutton and a lush,
13 and that was kind of a self-righteous judgment by the people
14 who were at the table.

15 Why is he eating and drinking with sinners and tax
16 collectors? You can almost see it.

17 I want to point out that in the original context
18 alcohol was involved.

19 I grew up as a very marginalized Methodist person,
20 and I love the Methodist tradition, but I wasn't really
21 included in it.

22 My mom would go and sing in the choir and my dad
23 would avoid, was basically the way our church family thing
24 worked.

25 But my dad had a real high self-righteousness

1 quotient because he didn't drink alcohol, and that's kind of
2 a Methodist thing, and I've told this story before, but I
3 had never tasted alcohol until I was about nine years old.

4 My dad had some friends, for some reason they liked
5 to play cards at our house, which that was okay, but no
6 alcohol in our house.

7 And one of his friends brought a six pack of
8 Budweiser to our house, and he was a dear friend, he's an
9 attorney friend of my dad's and he was a guy who taught me
10 how to pitch baseball.

11 But when he left, five of the beers had been
12 consumed by a couple of the card players and one of them was
13 left behind in the bottom shelf of our refrigerator.

14 It must have sat there for three months, and my
15 brother and I are nine and ten years old, and finally my dad
16 said, "You guys want to taste that beer?"

17 Family meeting. So my mom, my brother and I, and
18 my dad sat down.

19 He got out four little glasses, opened up that can
20 of Budweiser, poured a little bit in each one and he goes,
21 "Now, taste that and let that be a lesson to you."

22 I took a little sip of that Budweiser. Horrible.
23 He said, "Let that be a lesson to you. There's a lot of
24 people out there that drink that stuff."

25 It took me about eight years, but I rediscovered

1 that flavor.

2 (Laughter)

3 But I share that because we get into a
4 self-righteousness about I do or don't drink, and that's not
5 Jesus.

6 He's okay with us if we don't drink, and he's okay
7 with us if we do, but he does have some things to say about
8 that.

9 And they are always grace-oriented, but they are
10 also very, very powerful and important.

11 But you need to see, Levi, he's not a fisherman;
12 he's a player.

13 When we go to Europe, we have two kids that are
14 just like biological kids to us, we love them, Percy and
15 Inga.

16 I will never forget the first time we went to
17 Europe and took our kids, I think my son was about seven, my
18 daughter would have been about twelve, and I remember Inga
19 was our tour guide and we are walking through the city of
20 Marburg, which is very close to Frankfort, and I used to
21 live there when I was younger, and she was a university
22 student there at the time.

23 And she said, "My stomach is a bit upset, mom and
24 dad. Just a minute. I'll be right back."

25 She went into this pub, comes back with a little

1 thing of herbs and alcohol, and she throws it back right on
2 the street.

3 Our kids are like, "What is she doing? Inga
4 doesn't even drink."

5 It was something that settled her stomach. I
6 remember the look on my kids' face, like what is this all
7 about?

8 But there were kids similar size of our kids that
9 were having wine with their meal in the restaurants.

10 It was just part of the culture over there.
11 Luther, in his day, the 1500s, he encouraged people to drink
12 beer, because the water was poison and a little bit of
13 alcohol in the water was stored in the church to ferment and
14 it kept people alive because of the plague that was being
15 spread through the horrible water.

16 I only say that because sometimes Puritanism comes
17 over here and we want to get that part out of there about
18 alcohol, and you need to also know, rightfully so sometimes.

19 My great grandfather was an alcoholic. That's why
20 my dad had just a snake bit notion of that, because he had
21 lived through that hell of great grandpa and how he lost the
22 whole business and all that.

23 So please hear that as the utmost of respect of
24 that, but it's different in different cultures is what I'm
25 trying to say.

1 In Luke 10:7, "Eat and drink whatever they
2 provide."

3 This is what Jesus is telling the 70 when he sends
4 them out.

5 In other words, it's not okay to go out, and if
6 you're going to be at Levi's table, or somebody else's
7 table, and the first thing they say is here's some coffee
8 and cake, don't go I don't drink coffee.

9 You don't have to drink it, but at least be gentle
10 and say thank you for whatever they provide.

11 If they serve a little bit of wine, or a little bit
12 of beer with it, it's not real helpful to build
13 relationships and say, well, I'm sorry, I'm a Christian, I
14 don't drink.

15 And I'm not saying you drink because they are
16 drinking; I'm saying receive what they provide. Don't
17 judge, is what it's about.

18 And then Romans 6, "Should we continue to sin in
19 order that grace may abound? By no means. How can we who
20 died to sin go on living in it?"

21 In other words, some of us do have reasons not to
22 go back to that, and I understand that, and I have the most
23 respect in the world for people who have discovered that in
24 their lives, and I wish a whole lot more would discover it,
25 that that's a demon, and they better walk away from it and

1 they better get some help from Jesus of how to live their
2 life with a sense of balance, a higher power.

3 First Corinthians 6 says, "Do you not know that
4 your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you which
5 you have from God. You are not your own, for you were
6 bought with a price. Therefore, glorify God in your body."

7 That means garbage in - garbage out, but it's not
8 just about alcohol.

9 It's also about McDonald's all the time. The
10 lifestyle issue of eating garbage, we become lethargic and
11 sluggardly, slothful, but it's also of alcohol, too, just
12 pouring it back.

13 Check yourself. Get some help. Get some help.
14 Call somebody.

15 We've got referrals of people that are handling
16 that demon in the most awesome way.

17 So, I say all that because there is a social
18 context and a cultural context of that, Jesus being accused
19 of gluttony.

20 So that is where the game is played. It's played
21 at the dinner table. It's played at the bars.

22 It's played in the night clubs. In Sheffield,
23 England, they have a wonderful ministry where a lot of the
24 kids who have come to know Christ, all their ministry is
25 they go and give a bottle of water and chocolate bars to

1 people when they are coming out of the discos, because they
2 can remember when they used to take too much, imbibe too
3 much, that you would be dehydrated and just wiped out.

4 So they just take water and chocolate to those
5 people, no strings attached, but that's where they are
6 playing the game.

7 They're playing the game in brothels. They are
8 playing the game at the soccer complex. They are playing
9 the game all over.

10 That's where God calls us. Where is the game
11 played?

12 It's played at the table and beyond. It's a home
13 and away game.

14 Some people think it's just a home game, but when
15 we get the ball we play home and away.

16 How is the game played? It's interesting. Jesus
17 is very specific. Verse 18.

18 "The Pharisees were fasting and people came to him
19 and said, "How come John's disciples and the disciples of
20 the Pharisees fast, but your disciples don't fast?"

21 Jesus is such a great teacher, he's teaching them,
22 he said the game is played like a marriage.

23 Not just the wedding, but a marriage. It's
24 communication between partners, it involves a tremendous
25 amount of forgiveness, you have to give in order to receive,

1 you live for the other, the new and the old are always
2 learning.

3 You see that in what he says then. He says to
4 them, Verse 19, Jesus said to them, "The wedding guests
5 cannot fast while the bridegroom is with them, can they?"

6 You see, Jesus is the bridegroom, and the church is
7 the bride.

8 "As long as they have the bridegroom with them they
9 can't fast. The day will come when the bridegroom is taken
10 away from them and on that day they'll fast."

11 It's going to be a sad time when the bridegroom is
12 taken away, but it's only for three days.

13 In other words, the game is supposed to be played
14 like a marriage; not like a funeral. Like a wedding; not
15 like a funeral.

16 And weddings are supposed to be joyous occasions
17 with conviviality and tremendous celebration and this whole
18 embracing of life that is part of newness.

19 Then he gets real specific. "No one sews a piece
20 of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak; otherwise the patch pulls
21 from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made.
22 And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise the
23 wine will burst the skin and the wine is lost and so are the
24 skins. One puts new wine into fresh wineskins."

25 I believe that's what happens every time we come to

1 the Lord's table. We get new skin on.

2 Our tendency is to kind of view this as a very
3 somber funeral-like atmosphere, and I'm not saying we are
4 not supposed to be contrite, because I am a flower fading,
5 and I am a wave tossed in the ocean, and I've got some stuff
6 that I need to leave behind.

7 But, you see, it's a wedding; it isn't a funeral.
8 Because we are alive; we are not dead. We get a new chance.

9 I'm reading a new book by Len Sweet. Len is an
10 unbelievable author.

11 The book is called "Out Of The Question And Into
12 The Mystery."

13 He says, "God is mystery, not a master's thesis."

14 I love that quote alone.

15 "We have much to learn about the truth of God that
16 is revealed only through relationship. God is reorienting
17 the church to the context of its founder. Jesus was not a
18 Greek, nor was he a classical thinker. He was a Hebrew,
19 eastern in thought and culture, relational in practice, and
20 mystical in spirituality."

21 When we are called to play the game, we don't want
22 people to look like us and play like us; we want them to
23 become like Jesus. He's the player.

24 And the way we play the game, who is allowed to
25 play? We all are.

1 Where is it played? Home and away, but it begins
2 at the table, and then how is it played?

3 It's played with a good sense of humor, but it's
4 also played not thinking, well, I have to know more before I
5 go more.

6 God is a mystery; he's not a master's thesis. So
7 it's not about just learning, learning a bunch of stuff,
8 well, I'll take good notes on that and then I will be able
9 to get out there and play the game.

10 No, he's saying follow me today, and get out there,
11 get out of the bleachers and go for it.

12 It's interesting, because Jesus is not overly-
13 concerned with the Pharisees.

14 He doesn't tell them they are necessarily wrong.
15 He's just kind of telling them they are in the wrong
16 relationship.

17 I've come to call the sick. The people that are
18 well don't need a doctor.

19 And so those are the ones we are supposed to go and
20 play with, play for, play in, seek out.

21 He does really call us out of the bleachers. He
22 calls us to get out of the bleachers and into the game.

23 And when he does that, he says, you know, I know
24 you've dropped the ball a few times, and you've been knocked
25 down a few times, and you've you have been outnumbered and

1 outmanned and the motto of my high school football time was
2 we may be small, but we're slow.

3 (Laughter)

4 But, you see, he doesn't call the qualified; he
5 qualifies the called.

6 And he calls the fishermen and women. He calls the
7 tax collectors and payers, and he says, you guys, this game
8 is the greatest game ever played. We are all called to
9 play. Let's pray about it.

10 Thank you, Lord Jesus, for that voice from heaven
11 that says we are your beloved in whom you are well pleased.
12 With that call, Lord, comes the invitation to follow.

13 Thank you, Lord, for choosing even us to be on your
14 team.

15 Thank you for teaching us it's a home game and an
16 away game.

17 And thank you, Lord, for teaching us that the game
18 is played with integrity, vulnerability, and a whole lot of
19 joy.

20 We thank you, Lord, for the invitation today to
21 play, and for the forgiveness which is ours in Christ.

22 Amen.

23

24

25