

Mark Chapter 2 Continued

Verses 18-22: This is evidently a further incident, not directly connected in time with (verses 13-17). Pharisees fasted twice weekly (Luke 18:12).

Mark 2:18 "And the disciples of John and of the Pharisees used to fast: and they come and say unto him, Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but thy disciples fast not?"

“Disciples of John”: Those followers of John the Baptist who did not transfer their allegiance to Jesus (John 3:30; Acts 19:1-7). At this time John was in prison (Matt. 4:12). Their question indicates they were observing the Pharisaic traditions (Matt. 9:14).

The Pharisees” (see note on verse 16). The association of John’s disciples with the Pharisees indicates that both groups were disturbed about the problem raised by Jesus’ association with tax collectors and sinners (verse 15).

“Fast”: The twice-a-week fast was a major expression of Orthodox Judaism during Jesus’ day (Luke 18:9-14). Yet, the Old Testament prescribed only one fast, and that on the Day of Atonement (verse 16:29, 31).

(In Luke 18:12), we see a self-righteous Pharisee bragging that he fasts twice a week. Possibly, to make others look on him as more righteous than he really was.

Luke 18:12 "I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess."

Jesus warned about this type of fasting. Jesus told us when we fast to wash our faces and not let the world know when we fast, but to fast unto God. Possibly the reason John's followers were fasting was because John was in jail. It appears to me, that these Pharisees were jealous that Jesus' disciples were not fasting.

Mark 2:19 "And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? as long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast."

“As they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast”: In Jesus’ illustration, the “attendants of the bridegroom”, were the friends the bridegroom selected to carry out the festivities. That certainly was not a time to fast, which was usually associated with mourning or times of great spiritual need.

Jesus’ point was that the ritual practiced by John’s disciples and the Pharisees was out of touch with reality. There was no reason for Jesus’ followers to mourn and fast while enjoying the unique reality that He was with them.

People fast when they are in desperate need of having a prayer answered. While Jesus was with them, there was no desperate need of an answer to prayer. This verse is also prophetic. Jesus is the bridegroom of the bride of Christ (which we Christians are).

I say again, there is no need to fast when everything is going good. While Jesus was with them, He took care of all their needs, and there was no need to fast.

Mark 2:20 "But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days."

“Taken away from them”: This refers to a sudden removal or being snatched away violently, an obvious reference to Jesus’ capture and crucifixion.

“Then shall they fast”: An appropriate time for mourning was to be at the crucifixion of Jesus.

Jesus foresees the “days” when His disciples will “fast.” That time will be when He has returned to heaven. Fasting is practiced during a time of grief, not joy. As a bridegroom’s friends rejoice while he is with them (verse 19), and grieve when he is “taken away from them”. So Jesus’ disciples rejoice while He is among them, but will fast after His ascension into heaven (see Acts 13:2-3; 14:23).

All who study the Bible know that when Jesus was taken by the authorities, the disciples ran. They suddenly forgot all the times Jesus had told them that this very thing would happen. He told them He would be crucified and then rise from the grave on the third day. Then they would need to fast and pray, because Jesus had been taken away.

Instead of fasting and praying, they went back to their old jobs and old ways of life.

Verses 21-22: Jesus offered two parables to illustrate that His new and internal gospel of repentance from and forgiveness of sin could not be connected to or contained in the old and external traditions of self-righteousness and ritual (see note on Matt. 9:17).

Mark 2:21 "No man also seweth a piece of new cloth on an old garment: else the new piece that filled it up taketh away from the old, and the rent is made worse."

We know that this statement is very true. If we are patching an old garment, we should cut a patch of something equally worn so that the tear and the patch wear together. It would be a waste of new material also, to put it in something worn out.

Mark 2:22 "And no man putteth new wine into old bottles: else the new wine doth burst the bottles, and the wine is spilled, and the bottles will be marred: but new wine must be put into new bottles."

“Bottles” are wineskins, the “old” ones figuratively representing Judaism and the “new” ones, Christianity. Old wineskins lose their elasticity and would be “burst” open by the fermentation of “new wine” put into them. The point: the old faith of Judaism and the new faith of Christianity cannot be mixed, nor can the practices or traditions (e.g., the time of fasting), of Judaism be forced on Christianity.

The literal message here needs very little explanation. The fermenting of the new wine could cause old containers to give way. Probably, these were not glass bottles, but bottles made of skins.

I believe the real message that the Lord would have us receive here though is: The people who were caught up in the law would not accept this new message of grace. We see this even in our day. Those who have always looked at the literal message will not even try to see the spiritual message. New converts can be taught easily to see the spiritual message.

Verses 23-28: Jesus astounds by defying then-current Sabbath practice.

Mark 2:23 "And it came to pass, that he went through the corn fields on the sabbath day; and his disciples began, as they went, to pluck the ears of corn."

“Corn fields”: The roads in first-century Israel were primarily major arteries; so once travelers left those main roads they walked along wide paths that bordered and traversed pastures and grain-fields.

“On the Sabbath day”: “Sabbath” transliterates a Hebrew word that refers to a ceasing of activity or rest. In honor of the day when God rested from His creation of the world (Gen. 2:3), the Lord declared the seventh day of the week to be a special time of rest and remembrance for His people, which He incorporated into the Ten Commandments.

But hundreds of years of rabbinical teaching had added numerous unbearable and arbitrary restrictions to God’s original requirement, one of which forbade any travel beyond 3,000 feet of one’s home. (Num. 35:5; Jos. 3:4).

“Pluck the ears of corn”: Travelers who did not take enough food for their journey were permitted by Mosaic Law to pick enough grain to satisfy their hunger (Deut. 23:24-25; see note on Matt. 12:2).

We see here, that they were on the move. Perhaps, they had not been eating and they saw this fresh, ripe corn. They did not stop to cook this, so they just shucked it and cleaned the corn silks off as they walked and ate these juicy kernels. There is a little more detailed account of this same thing in Luke.

Luke 6:1, "And it came to pass on the second sabbath after the first, that he went through the corn fields; and his disciples plucked the ears of corn, and did eat, rubbing them in their hands."

The spiritual message that we must get from this is: The Word (food), is not always prepared for us. We have to do a little work digging (rubbing), the Word out before we can digest it.

Mark 2:24 "And the Pharisees said unto him, Behold, why do they on the sabbath day that which is not lawful?"

“On the Sabbath that which is not lawful”: Rabbinical tradition had interpreted the rubbing of grain in the hands (Luke 6:1), as a form of threshing and had forbidden it. Reaping for profit on the Sabbath was forbidden by Mosaic Law (Exodus 34:21).

Actually, the Pharisees’ charge was itself sinful since they were holding their tradition on a par with God’s Word (see notes on Matt. 15:2-9).

This reminds me so much of some of our churches today. Some churches have their own laws that you have to stick to, or you are just not allowed to be in that body.

Every church has its Pharisees: caught up so in the "don'ts" that it is very difficult to get anything going. These Pharisees pointed to the law and said you can't do this; you are breaking the Mosaic Law. They didn't even realize that Jesus was the law maker.

Mark 2:25 "And he said unto them, Have ye never read what David did, when he had need, and was an hungered, he, and they that were with him?"

“He said unto them, Have ye never read”: Jesus’ sarcasm pointed out the main fault of the Pharisees, who claimed to be experts and guardians of scripture, yet were ignorant of what it actually taught (Rom. 2:17-24).

“What David did”: David and his companions were fleeing for their lives from Saul when they arrived at Nob, where the tabernacle was located at that time. Because they were hungry, they asked for food (1 Sam. 21:1-6).

Jesus here said, don't you even know what is in your own book of law? You profess to know everything about the book of law, and yet, you do not know this simple thing. The story of David going to the temple when he was running from Saul and getting five loaves of shewbread for him and his men is found (in First Samuel chapter 21).

These Pharisees did not realize that Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath.

Mark 2:26 "How he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and did eat the shewbread, which is not lawful to eat but for the priests, and gave also to them which were with him?"

“In the days of Abiathar the high priest”: The phrase “in the days” can mean “during the lifetime.” According to (1 Sam. 21:1), Ahimelech was the priest who gave the bread to David. Abiathar was Ahimelech’s son, who later was the High-priest during David’s reign.

Since Ahimelech died shortly after this incident (1 Sam. 22:19-20), it is likely that Mark simply added this designation to identify the well-known companion of David who later became the High-Priest along with Zadok (2 Sam. 15:35).

“The shewbread”: Twelve loaves of unleavened bread (representing the twelve tribes of Israel), were placed on the table in the sanctuary and at the end of the week replaced with fresh ones. The old loaves were to be eaten only by the priests.

While it was not normally lawful for David and his companions to eat this consecrated bread, neither did God want them to starve, so nowhere does Scripture condemn them for eating (see note on Matt. 12:4).

Helping David caused problems for this priest with Saul, and he later fled and joined David in exile. This shewbread was the bread in the holy place on the table always before the Lord. This bread was sprinkled with incense when brought into the holy place and was eaten by the priests only. The new bread was brought each Sabbath to replace the old which was eaten.

This eating of the shewbread had sustained David in his time of need, and this is just what the disciples had done as well, eaten to sustain themselves.

Verses 27-28: Jesus’ reasoning is that divine institutions on earth are to have a God-honoring, noble, and liberating function. Sabbath laws had for some degenerated into a mockery of God’s intent. Jesus, “the Son of man” and “Lord . . . of the Sabbath,” having power to forgive sin, can also teach rightly regarding proper observance of the Jewish Sabbath. Jesus here touches a raw nerve, as the next incident shows.

Mark 2:27 "And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath:"

“The Sabbath was made for man”: God instituted the Sabbath to benefit man by giving him a day to rest from his labors and to be a blessing to him. The Pharisees turned it into a burden and made man a slave to their myriad of man-made regulations.

Man must cease labor one day a week to give his body a time to restore itself. If a man fails to rest one day in seven, he soon becomes sick and not able to go. When we stay too busy, we have a tendency to forget about God. On this day of rest from daily labor, we can tend to the needs of our souls. It gives us time to think about other things, besides just making a living.

We remember that there were exceptions made for necessity in the law. God allowed a man to free his animal, if he got in trouble on the Sabbath. This just shows that God is concerned about the needs of mankind more than He is interested in us dogmatically obeying the law.

Mark 2:28 "Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath."

“Lord also of the Sabbath”: Jesus claimed He was greater than the Sabbath, and thus was God. Based on that authority, Jesus could in fact reject the Pharisaic regulations concerning the Sabbath and restore God’s original intention for Sabbath observance to be a blessing not a burden.

The Son of man is Lord of everything and everyone. We have mentioned before that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow.

Philippians 2:10-11 "That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of [things] in heaven, and [things] in earth, and [things] under the earth;" "And [that] every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ [is] Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

No further explanation is necessary. He is Lord of everything.

Mark Chapter 2 Continued Questions

1. Whose disciples who fasted came and asked why Jesus' disciples didn't fast?
2. What describes the attitude of the Pharisees?
3. When we fast, who are we to tell?
4. What did Jesus call Himself in verse 19?
5. When do people fast?
6. When will Jesus' disciples fast?
7. What did Jesus' disciples do when the authorities took Jesus?
8. What had they forgotten?
9. Why would a man not put a new piece of cloth in an old garment?
10. Why would you not put new wine in old bottles?
11. What is the spiritual message in the statement above?
12. Those who have always looked at the literal message in the Word will seldom see the _____.
13. Who is easy to teach the spiritual message?
14. What did the disciples do, as they walked through the cornfield?

15. What day was it?
16. What does Luke 6:1 tell us about this story that was not in Mark?
17. What is the spiritual meaning of this?
18. Who complained about the disciples doing this on the Sabbath?
19. What are the Pharisees in the church doing today?
20. What Old Testament personality did Jesus remind them of?
21. What had he done that could have been judged a sin?
22. What happened to the priest that helped David?
23. What was the shewbread sprinkled with?
24. Who was the Sabbath made for?
25. Who is the Lord of Sabbath?