

¹⁸ The disciples of John and of the Pharisees were fasting. Then they came and said to Him, “Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?” ¹⁹ And Jesus said to them, “Can the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast. ²⁰ But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days. ²¹ No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; or else the new piece pulls away from the old, and the tear is made worse. ²² And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine bursts the wineskins, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins.” ²³ Now it happened that He went through the grainfields on the Sabbath; and as they went His disciples began to pluck the heads of grain. ²⁴ And the Pharisees said to Him, “Look, why do they do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?” ²⁵ But He said to them, “Have you never read what David did when he was in need and hungry, he and those with him: ²⁶ how he went into the house of God *in the days* of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the showbread, which is not lawful to eat except for the priests, and also gave some to those who were with him?” ²⁷ And He said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. ²⁸ Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath.”

¹ And He entered the synagogue again, and a man was there who had a withered hand. ² So they watched Him closely, whether He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him. ³ And He said to the man who had the withered hand, “Step forward.” ⁴ Then He said to them, “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?” But they kept silent. ⁵ And when He had looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts, He said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” And he stretched *it* out, and his hand was restored as whole as the other. ⁶ Then the Pharisees went out and immediately plotted with the Herodians against Him, how they might destroy Him.

Introduction

Every month before our “Communion Service” we have been studying Mark’s Gospel.

So far Mark has focused upon three things.

1. Who Jesus is and His authority. We discovered that Jesus is the beloved Son of God, (1: v. 11) who has authority over people and diseases.
2. We discovered why Jesus left the glory of heaven to come to this world. In chapter 1: v. 38 we are told that He came to preach the gospel of the kingdom of God. The miracles that Jesus produced were only to draw attention to the Gospel message and to prove his deity.
3. We discovered whom Jesus came for. (2: v.17) Jesus came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. We discovered that some people feel that they don’t need Jesus, they are good enough to get to heaven without Him. These good religious people are rejected by Jesus.

In the passage that I read, Mark 2: v.18-3:v.6) Mark continues these main themes and highlights them by recording 3 real incidents in the life and ministry of Jesus.

It is these incidents that we are going to study this morning.

1. Jesus introduces Himself as the Bridegroom – v. 18-22.

In v. 18-22, the religious leaders challenged Jesus about the fact that his disciples were not fasting.

First of all, we need to understand a little about the fasting habits of Jewish people.

The Old Testament habit of fasting was primarily an expression of sorrow for sin.

It was only an obligation for the Jewish people on the annual day of “Atonement”.

(Leviticus 16)

This was a very “Holy Day” for the Jewish people. Once a year the Jewish High Priest offered the blood of a young Bull as a sin offering to God.

It was a substitute sacrifice to cleanse the people from their sins.

Even today most Jewish people fast on this day.

However stricter Jews in the time that Jesus walked on this earth, practiced fasting on a Monday and a Thursday. This was from 6 a.m. in the morning until 6p.m. at night.

Although there are good reasons for fasting, the problem with the religious leaders at that time was that their fasting was intended to be a display of self-righteousness.

The Pharisees wanted praise from men, when fasting was designed for humility and sorrow for sin which brought you into a closer walk with God.

In answer to why the disciples of Jesus did not fast on a Monday and a Thursday, Jesus revealed another aspect of who He was and why He came.

Jesus answers their question about fasting in two parts.

First of all, Jesus described Himself as a "Bridegroom" and His disciples as "Friends of the Bridegroom".

Jewish weddings are different from most other western weddings today.

A Jewish couple after they are married did not go away on a honeymoon holiday. Instead they had a one-week banquet.

Their home was an open house of food and rejoicing and all the wedding guests were exempt from fasting.

In Jewish tradition you NEVER fasted during a wedding feast.

Now Jesus did not say that they shouldn't fast, He said that they need not fast while He was present with them.

This statement identified Jesus as the "Bridegroom" of Israel.

The Jewish Prophets, Hosea, Isaiah and Jeremiah all describe the Jewish Messiah as a "Husband" which is a strange description.

(Hosea 2: v. 16-20, Isaiah 54: v.5, Jeremiah 31: v.3)

It is only a strange description if you miss the connection between Jesus, the "Bridegroom" and those who will one day be the beautiful bride in Heaven.

The Bible teaches that the "Church", that is all those who put their faith and trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins, are the bride of Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 5: v. 25-27. (N.L. T.)

²⁵ For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her ²⁶ to make her holy and clean, washed by the cleansing of God's word.^[a] ²⁷ He did this to present her to himself as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Instead, she will be holy and without fault.

Japanese women all like to have western style weddings.

They dress up in a beautiful white dress, have a lovely hair design and have a great day, marrying their loved one.

Maybe you have been through that experience, or perhaps you are still waiting to be a bride for someone.

Don't dream about that, dream about something much better and that is being the "Bride of Jesus Christ"

One day you are going to look more beautiful than the bride in the photo.

The reason is that if you know and love Jesus, you will be clothed with the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

You will attend a wedding feast at the marriage supper of the lamb, Jesus Christ. This will be in Heaven.

There will be no fasting there only rejoicing.

The disciples of Jesus did not fast because they were experiencing the presence of God, through the person of Jesus Christ. It was a wonderful time and yet very few people appreciated the fact that Jesus on this earth was like being at a wedding feast.

The second half of Jesus's answer to their question about Not fasting concerns connecting something new with something old.

Jesus uses two illustrations that the people of that day would understand.

Jesus used these illustrations to highlight that He was bringing in something completely "NEW" that although connected with the old, completely replaced it in every way.

Jesus made it clear that the "New Age" that He was bringing in would not fit with the Old Testament religion.

Jesus is not being critical of the “Old Testament Law”, He was saying that the old practices would become inappropriate.

In v. 21 Jesus says that no one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. The reason for this is when the garment gets wet in the rain, the new patch will shrink and because it is much stronger, it will pull away from the rest of the garment.

In v. 22 Jesus says that no one puts new wine into old wine skins. At this time wine was not kept in bottles, it was kept in animal skins.

When the skins were new, they had a certain amount of elasticity.

They could stretch without breaking.

However, as the wine skins grew older, they became harder and unable to stretch.

When wine is still fermenting, it gives off gases which cause pressure. If new wine was poured into old wine skins, then it would explode.

The skin and the wine would be lost.

You can't have the new with the old, the new is totally new and not compatible with the old.

The New Age that Jesus was bringing in did not fit with the Old Testament Religion.

Application

A Scottish Bible teacher, famous in the 1960's for his T.V. preaching said this.

“As we grow older almost everyone develops a constitutional dislike of that which is new and unfamiliar. We grow very unwilling to make any adjustments in our habits and ways of life.”

Japan is a country which is embedded in an Old Religion which has affected its culture and practices.

Buddhist and Shinto practices have been adapted to form the culture of Japan.

It is not possible to add Christianity to the Japanese culture, although many try with their western weddings.

If you embrace Christianity, it must radically change your whole life. It is new and exciting, but it is also radical and transforming.

You will no longer desire to follow Japanese customs where they differ from Bible teaching.

You will be like the new patch of cloth on an old garment.

To survive as a Christian in Japan you must know the bridegroom Jesus personally and be convicted that you are the bride of Christ and will one day meet him in Heaven.

The only way to start a relationship with Jesus is by acknowledging who he is and why He came. Jesus is God and He came to die for sinners like us.

You need to forsake your Old Religion and come to your creator and acknowledge Him as your personal Saviour.

Q. will you do this today?

2. Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath – v. 23-28.

In v. 23-28 Mark records another incident where Jesus disobeys Jewish traditions.

This time the challenge comes from the Religious leaders on what you can and cannot do on the “Sabbath Day”.

When God was setting apart the Jewish Nation as His chosen people, He made 10 Laws or Commandments for His people to obey.

One of those commandments was to keep one day in seven “Holy” and do no work on that day. It was designated as a day of rest and recognition of their creator God.

There were no specific rules on exactly what you could do or not do.

However, over the years the religious leaders had brought out lots of little rules about what you could not do on the Sabbath day and what constituted work.

Some of these rules were definitely not God inspired and just brought a legalistic attitude to this special day.

In the text the disciples of Jesus were criticised for taking the heads of grain to eat as they passed the fields.

Among the thousands of rules brought in by the religious leaders, there were four which were against reaping, threshing, winnowing and preparing a meal on the Sabbath day.

Strictly speaking the disciples were breaking this Law.

Jesus replied to this challenge by quoting an incident from the Old Testament scriptures. (1 Samuel 21: v. 1-6)

By quoting this story Jesus vindicated His disciples and it also challenged the religious leaders for wrongly interpreting the scriptures.

Jesus was saying that the Sabbath day was created for mankind's enjoyment and benefit and was not meant to be a burden.

Unfortunately, the Religious Leaders were more concerned to honour their religion, than to honour God.

We are told in v. 28 that the Son of Man, that is Jesus is also Lord of the Sabbath.

In other words, Jesus, who is God can correctly interpret the Sabbath because He made the Law in the first place and can rightly interpret it.

Today as was the case at the time, Jesus interprets the Law of the Sabbath based upon "Grace" and not upon "Law".

What do I mean by that?

Application

I want to quote from an English writer called Brian Edwards who wrote a book called "The 10 Commands for today".

To summarize his writing concerning the Sabbath day or Sunday he says this.

" The ideal use of this day is to spend time with God's people in worship and ministry so that we have tuned our hearts towards God, and that our minds have listened to God's voice, storing up truth and application for another week ahead.

We should also make time to relax and refresh our bodies.

However, we can't be another person's conscience in the details of this day.

Anything is legitimate provided that it is governed by the purpose of this day.

He goes on to say the following:

Those who destroy this day by ignoring it altogether or who blunt the force of the commandment by softening its relevance, are no better than those who destroy it by the addition of human regulations.

Finally ,Mark reinforces Jesus understanding concerning the Sabbath by telling a story of when Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath day.

3. Jesus was rejected by human religion – Chapter 3: v. 1-6.

In this section, which is the third dispute with the religious leaders, the Pharisees became so angry that they decided to plan to kill Jesus.

The Pharisees had a rule that you could not heal on the Sabbath unless life was in danger.

Jesus broke that rule in order to heal a man with a deformed hand/ disabled hand.

In this miracle Jesus places the quality of mercy above the value of His own life.

Sadly, the only person rejoicing is the man whose hand is now healed.

Application

Religion is the killer of "Grace" and "Compassion".

It never brings "Joy" in the heart, it only brings with it a burden and sometimes pride.

If you are a Christian it is your responsibility to minister a gospel of "Grace" and "Love" through both teaching the "Truth" of the Bible and seeking to 'live it out' in the reality of your own life.

It is very tempting to walk away from people in society with deep hurts and needs, but when we acknowledge all that Jesus has done for us on the cross, while we were yet sinners, how can we not reach out to a hurting world with God's Grace and Love.

May God help us this year to show His love in WORD and DEED. Amen.