

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARK

SESSION 3: CHAPTER 2:18 - 3:6 "CONTINUING CONFLICT"

In the last study, we saw the beginning of the opposition to Jesus and his ministry. Now that opposition gains momentum from the Pharisees and, by the end of Chapter 3, even his own family



Read Mark 2: 18 – 22

NB Having been condemned for eating with publicans and sinners in v.16, Jesus is now criticised because his disciples were not observing the Pharisaic rules of fasting

QUESTIONS:

1(a). Why might it have been appropriate for the disciples of John the Baptist to fast?

How does Jesus explain his disciples' failure to fast?

(b) What does he mean by using the image of a wedding party and the bridegroom?

What does he mean by the images of the patches and the wine skins?

(c) Is Jesus condemning fasting as such in this passage? In what ways might it be helpful to fast today?

(d) In what ways might we be inflexible?



NB The Day of Atonement was the only time when God's law prescribed that the people were to deny themselves food. The more ascetic disciples of John and the conscientious Pharisees fasted more often (cf Luke 18:12).

Fasting was associated with three things:

- (1) sorrow for a deceased person;
- (2) penitential mourning to mollify the wrath of God and to avert calamity; and
- (3) petition to God.

According to the *Psalms of Solomon* 3:6–8, the righteous one avoids repeated sins, “searches his house to remove unintentional sins,” and “atones for (sins of) ignorance by fasting and humbling his soul, and the Lord will cleanse every devout person and his house.” Fasting could also be related to a fear of demons, who were thought to gain power over someone through eating.

Read Mark 2: 23 - 27

NB Jesus and his disciples were not stealing when they were picking the grain in the field. Leviticus 19: 9-10 and Deuteronomy 23:25 say that Jewish farmers were to leave the corners and the edges of their fields unharvested so that the grain could be picked by travellers and the poor. (cf. Story of Ruth)

- 2.(a) What was "unlawful" about the disciples actions?
- (b) How are Jesus' and the Pharisees' attitudes toward the Sabbath different?
- (c) How does Jesus describe his situation as being similar to that of David (cf. 1Sam 21:1-6)?
What might be the significance of Jesus comparing himself to David?
- (d) Why do you think that the details between the two accounts of the same event are so different?
- (e) How do Jesus' comments in vv. 27-28 rebuke both too rigid and too lax a view of the Sabbath?
- (f) What do you think v.27 means? How does Jesus describe himself again?

NB *The two accounts could not be so different: David was by himself, no companions. No mention of hunger. David does not enter the house of God the priest was Ahimilech... though David took the bread it does not mention that he ate it...Is this a series of mistakes or some sort of joke..?*

"The point of Jesus' reply is to show that these Pharisees, eager to burden the common people with the details of the Law, are actually so ignorant of Scripture that they do not notice one misquotation after another. Such matters are not altogether changed, and those who quote a particular biblical passage as a means of condemnation often turn out not to know its context or its relation to other biblical text?"

PLACHER



Read Mark 3: 1 - 6

Three times already, Jesus or his disciples have done something that could be counted as “working on the Sabbath”... but the attitudes of those who would eventually oppose him are hardening....

- 3.(a) How can we tell from v.2 that the relationship between Jesus and some of the religious leaders has worsened?
- (b) How does Jesus justify what he is about to do?
Why were his opponents silent?
- (c) Why do you think he goes ahead even though he is aware his is being watched?

NB Technically Jesus does no work. He just invites the man to stretch out his hand!

- (d) Why do you think Jesus is described as being angry (v.5)?
- (e) John Wesley wrote: “He was angry at the sin, and in the same moment grieved for the sinners..... With anger, yea hatred, he looked upon the thing, with grief and love upon the persons.”
What do you make of such an assessment?
- (f) For the Pharisees, Sabbath laws had become more important than the reason for the Sabbath.
How can we "Keep Sunday Special" without becoming pharisaical?

NB The “Herodians” (a word Mark seems to have made up for the occasion followed a notoriously scandalous half-Jewish king who clung to political power. The Pharisees believed in following the Jewish Law.

- (g) What did they have in common?
What is ironic about the Pharisees reaction to Jesus healing on the Sabbath?

For Further Reflection

- 4.(a) Why do you think Jesus aroused such fierce determination to do away with him, when what he was doing must have been recognised as good?