

Mark 2:18-22 (NLT)

The Gospel of Mark Feasting Not Fasting

Introduction: If it's your first time joining us - Welcome! We are dedicating this year to deepening our discipleship to Jesus. We are taking this next season to teach through the Gospel of Mark, using it, as Christians have done for centuries, as a template to understand in a deeper way who Jesus is and what it means to be his disciples.

A few weeks ago we looked at Mark's gospel being an invitation to discipleship to Jesus. An invitation to be with Jesus, to become like Jesus, and to do what Jesus did. That means then that as we walk through the Gospel of Mark we should be looking for rhythms, habits and disciplines of Jesus' life that we as disciples can follow.

“My central claim is that we can become like Christ by doing one thing - by following him in the overall style of life he chose for himself. If we have faith in Christ, we must believe that he knew how to live. We can, through faith and grace become like Christ by practicing the types of activities he engaged in, by arranging our whole lives around the activities he himself practiced in order to remain constantly at home in the fellowship of his father.

What activities did Jesus practice? Such things as solitude and silence, prayer, simple and sacrificial living, intense study and meditation upon God's word and God's ways, and service to others. Some of these will certainly be even more necessary to us than they were to him, because of our greater or different need...

*So, if we wish to follow Jesus Christ – and to walk in the easy yoke with him – we will have to accept his overall way of life as our way of life totally. Then, and only then, we may reasonably expect to know by experience how easy is the yoke and how light the burden.” - Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines**

This is a big focus of our studies through Mark - Learning the Rhythms of Jesus. Last week we saw how inviting those who are far from God to be in our lives was a mark of Jesus' life. It's one of the ways that we are to follow him. In this next section, continuing with the theme of conflict with the religious leaders we have Jesus and his disciples out of sync with the cultural norms of the day. In this passage the people are curious about Jesus and his disciples because they are not fasting(Again, Jesus' life is curious - It prompts questions). John's disciples and the Pharisees fasted regularly. But not Jesus and his company - In fact quite the opposite. It sounds like they feasted quite a bit. Jesus, at one point, is accused of being a drunkard and a glutton. So why does Mark highlight this story? What does this mean for followers, and apprentices of Jesus.

Let's take a closer look at this story and see what we can learn about what it means to be followers and disciples of Jesus.

1. Jewish Fasting

- a. So why do John, his disciples, and the Pharisees fast?
 - i. And what is fasting again?
- b. In Christian tradition - we fast in order to gain some benefit. This might be for personal discipline, spiritual growth, victory over a certain sin, (And these are good things and is an effective practice).
- c. My understanding growing up, though I honestly didn't give much thought to it, was that fasting was in some sense a way to put God in your debt - you gave something up, perhaps Nintendo for a week or breakfast - So he owes you an answered prayer or something...And this is still a pretty prevalent idea in the church
 - i. **The funny thing is that you can't find anything close to this teaching in the Bible..**
- d. **True Fasting**
 - i. In scripture what we find is that fasting is a whole body response to human grief and serious conditions. In Jewish tradition it was done during times of national

crisis such as drought, famine, destructive earthquakes, crop disease, military attack or attack from wild predators.

- ii. *"Fasting means a human being refrains from food or drink, or both, for a limited time in response to some sacred, grievous moment. Such sacred or grievous moments include death, the threat of war, sin, our neediness, or our fear of God's judgment on our sin, (whether personal or national)....The focus of the Bible on fasting is not what we get from fasting or on motivating people to fast in order to acquire something, but instead lands squarely on responding to sacred moments in life."*
- Scot McKnight, *Sermon on the Mount*
- iii. During the 1st century the Religious Leaders, especially the Pharisees, had such a powerful influence over the Jewish culture, even the Sadducees that did not agree with Pharisee theology and philosophy had to go along with it because they had such sway over the people and culture of the day. Well in this time of the 1st century (2nd Temple Judaism) the Pharisees had instituted a twice a week fast. Why? The reason was to show God their repentance and grief over their past sins whether personally or nationally, so that God would then restore them, and END THE EXILE, finally bringing about the Messianic kingdom... Remember I just said, Fasting is a whole body response to human grief and serious conditions i.e - THE EXILE, Roman occupation and rule over the people of God.
- iv. Within Judaism at this time the thinking was - if we get back to rigid covenant keeping by doing Mosaic Law God will bring the kingdom... We actually know this from later Rabbinic Judaism - the dominant view of the Pharisees and religious elites of the day was that the long awaited Messiah and God's salvation would only come

when Israel had made itself ready and worthy by observance of religious law...

- v. So John, his disciples, and the religious leaders fast as a national response to still being in Exile. Their prayer is probably that of the Psalms - **“Restore us again, God our Savior, and put away your displeasure toward us.”**
- **Psalm 85:4**
- vi. The unfortunate thing is that this fasting became a kind of virtue signaling of it's time, showcasing your holiness or righteousness to others - it then became a way to shame and rebuke the sinful among Israel (probably what Jesus is referring to in the SM)
- vii. Ok, This seems like a legitimate good thing, when done right. So, why do Jesus and his followers reject this practice?

2. Feasting not Fasting

- a. Jesus does not share the religious leaders, nor John and his disciples' assessment of the time.
- b. Let's be clear, Jesus is not down on fasting in general (he actually teaches on the topic in the SM and implies that his disciples will fast. Saying, “when you fast”). But Jesus does not share the sentiment of the religious leaders, nor their understanding of the time. Jesus' point here seems to be that John's disciples and the Pharisees have not discerned correctly what time it is. It is not time to fast it's time to feast and celebrate.. why? Because the bridegroom is here, and the wedding feast is at hand...or another way to put it the king is here bringing the kingdom. (Interesting to note, Jesus refers to himself as the bridegroom, which the prophets used as an image or metaphor for YHWH himself - Isaiah 50:1; 54:5-8; 62:4-5; Jeremiah 2:2, 32-33; 3:1, 14; 31:32; Ezekiel 16:8)
- c. I'm simplifying it for us but Jesus responds with 3 mini parables or metaphors, talking about weddings, clothing and wine

- d. He asks - You wouldn't fast for a wedding would you? Can you imagine?? That would be totally inappropriate, so disrespectful to the day, the family, to the couple
- e. You wouldn't patch an old coat with new fabric would you? - it won't last, it doesn't fit, it doesn't match...
 - i. I loved the Message translation here - **"No one cuts up a fine silk scarf to patch old work clothes."** It's ridiculous
- f. And Lastly, You wouldn't put new wine into cracked bottles - (It will explode and spoil all that good wine)
- g. In all these ways what Jesus is saying is that the old ways of thinking and living cannot contain the New thing that God is doing... They are out of joint and inappropriate...
 - i. But I want to specifically focus on Jesus' metaphor of the bridegroom and wedding.
- h. The religious leaders see this "time" as Exilic. Punishment. As a time to mourn and lament. Jesus likens himself to the bridegroom and this "time" as the wedding. As I said, this was a way that the scripture often talked about God's relationship with Israel, and God's plans for them. The coming kingdom of God was likened to a great wedding feast (Jesus loves to use this metaphor). Why a wedding feast? Think about our own wedding celebrations. It's this culmination of so much work, planning and anticipation - all the plans have been made, the day is set, everything is prepared, and then the day comes. It's a day of total celebration, everyone looking so lovely in their finest clothes. There is incredible food and drink to enjoy. There is dancing and singing. There are tears of joy and laughter. It is a day to end all days. And Scripture uses this incredible metaphor to help us picture what the kingdom of God will be like - Absolute bliss
 - i. Listen to how the prophet describes the scene, **"On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is**

cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. It will be said on that day, "Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation." -Isaiah 25:6-9

- ii. In Revelation this same event is referred to as The Marriage Supper of the Lamb. **"Then the angel said to me, " Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb!" "And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." -Revelation 19:9; 21:2**
- iii. *"(The Marriage Supper of the lamb) celebrates at long last the intimate and permanent union of people who love each other. And this is how history ends: this is what Jesus came to accomplish. We the bride, the people Jesus has loved, will finally be united with him. The most rapturous love of a wedded couple on earth is just the dimmest hint and echo of that cosmic future reality." - Tim Keller, Encounters with Jesus*
- iv. In Jesus' estimation this is the "time" that they are in - **THE KINGDOM IS HERE! IT'S TIME TO CELEBRATE AND INVITE ANY AND ALL TO THE GREAT CELEBRATION!**
- v. So here is a question - How does the kingdom of God come? Is it through religious zeal, through fasting, mourning, sacrifice and human earning? Or does the kingdom of God come as a sheer act of God's mercy, grace and faithfulness?

- vi. You see the kingdom is already here in Jesus, and it didn't come because of Israel's faithfulness but because of the faithfulness and love of God!! God's kingdom comes as a sheer act of grace and not because of our religious zeal, not now, not ever.

3. What does all this mean for Disciples?

- a. Two thoughts for application:
- b. First, I think one big idea here is a warning about missing out on the kingdom work of God because we are so sure that we know what that is supposed to look like..
- c. Maybe this is more in a personal way - we have our list that we give to God - I want you to help me here, here and here... But what if God isn't doing any of that stuff? What if he wants to do something totally unexpected? What if we - the people of God miss out on the kingdom of God, or God's work in our own lives and our time because we are so certain of what it should look like- this question should really humble us, and keep us open to the Holy Spirit
- d. How may God want to work in a new way? I think about the church's history, everything from the inclusion of the Gentiles, to the many times God has brought revival. If you read history you'll know that in these moments it wasn't the respectable religious that experienced the presence and power of God - it was the outsiders and outcasts, the "ignorant, and common people" it was the hippie's back in our parent's days. Who is that group today? And how does that come about?
 - i. How does the kingdom of God come? Is it through religious zeal, through fasting, mourning, sacrifice and human earning? Or does the kingdom of God come as a sheer act of God's mercy, grace and faithfulness?
 - ii. That doesn't mean that we stop seeking his will, walking in righteousness and truth, it doesn't mean that we don't grieve over sin and brokenness but it does mean that underneath all that we remember that God works and

brings about his kingdom because of his goodness, mercy and faithfulness, not ours.

- iii. What we want to always be asking is - What is God doing and how can we be sensitive to it and be part of his kingdom work?
- e. Secondly, I think a question is as Disciples of Jesus, do our lives show forth a doom and gloom, mourning the past sins, and seeing this present time as God's judgment on the church or the world?? Or do our lives show forth a Kingdom hope, a Prophetic hope? Sometimes I love to imagine what it will look like for Sonoma County to be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. What it would like for this place to be filled with the spirit of God!
- f. Remember Peter's words to the church? In 1 Peter - this is a church that is on the fringe of society, suspect to the authorities, being ostracized, criticized and even persecuted and Peter's words to them are about living out our hope in Resurrection - Or living now the life of the kingdom..
- g. Or take Paul the Apostle's vision - Paul saw what God did in and through Jesus as the climax of the story of the world - the defeat of sin, evil and death at the cross, the resurrection from the dead, the ascension of the son of man to the right hand of God, the pouring out of the holy Spirit - God's presence here on earth with individual people, the gathering together of the people of God in one family - the church and the breaking in of the new age and the rule of God's kingdom - **The KINGDOM OF GOD HAS COME AND IS WIDE OPEN!** What are we waiting for? Go tell everyone! Live this life of the kingdom of the heavens in every nook and cranny of the world today!
- h. Do our lives reflect that same joy, and celebration of Jesus?? Now is the time to proclaim that the kingdom offer is here! To believe, to join, to receive that same living hope...
- i. Do we share Paul's vision of the kingdom? - It's already been done, the night is far spent and the day is at hand!! Do we live with that same joyous and hopeful outlook??

- j. Is your life defined as joyful feasting that attracts people; welcoming them to the feast of God? Or are you a dismal, wet blanket, preaching doom and gloom, condemning all those around you
- k. This Celebratory life isn't blind optimism that we're talking about (Life is hard, and filled with many danger, toils and snares - But underneath and beyond all that is this trust that the power of God, that the kingdom of God is greater than any threat that could ever come it's way.
- l. I'll leave you with this. Leslie Newbigin, the great Missionary to India, once said, "*I am neither an optimist or a pessimist; Jesus Christ is risen from the dead.*" And the promise is that since he died and rose again, we also who have given our allegiance to Jesus will rise again and be partakers of the joyous kingdom of God, life without end, and yet that life and celebration begins now.
- m. **Closing prayer:** Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love. Where there is injury, pardon. Where there is doubt, faith. Where there is despair, hope. Where there is darkness, light. And where there is sadness, joy. O Divine Master, grant that I may Not so much seek to be consoled as to console, to be understood, as to understand. To be loved, as to love. For it is in giving that we receive. And it's in pardoning that we are pardoned. And it's in dying that we are born to Eternal Life. Amen