

Our passage today is one of Mark's controversy narratives. Jesus often shook up the status quo. In a little more than one chapter we have seen Jesus in several situations that Jews of that day would find questionable. He cast out a demon on the Sabbath, touched a leper, forgave sins, and invited a tax collector to be among His disciples. He even dined with tax collectors and sinners! In today's passage the controversy intensifies. What we see is Jesus' realization of His calling and purpose conflicting with the culture's expectations. He is not trying to be controversial. He is following the direction of His Father. In doing so, He sometimes acts in counter cultural ways. The world's response to those actions reveals the lack of compassion and understanding in Judaism of that day. Every culture needs individuals who care more about God's leading than cultural norms so that they can demonstrate the heart of God. We will be misunderstood by most, but received by some, just as Jesus was (John 15:20ⁱ).

¹⁸ *Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. And people came and said to him, "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?"* Mark 2:18 People were amazed at Jesus' teaching and miracles, but they noticed something different about their behavior. There was a joy that seemed so different from the religious leaders and even different from John and his disciples. They did not fast like these other groups did. Fasting seems like such a sincere religious effort, and these two groups that the people respected did fast regularly. The people struggled to have sufficient food, so to do without seemed to take sincere dedication. They were curious why Jesus and His disciples did not do what seemed to be such a holy discipline. So, the people asked the disciples why they did not fast.

I do not think the question came as an accusation. The people wanted to understand and learn. The Pharisees fasted twice a week. It could be that the Pharisees made accusations against Jesus that the people heard and desired an answer.

It must have been the same kind of thing in the early church when they began worshiping on Sunday (Acts 20:7ⁱⁱ; 1 Corinthians 16:2ⁱⁱⁱ). Jews must have asked why they did not worship on the Sabbath. Then they had the wonderful opportunity to declare they were not under the old covenant, but the new one predicted by Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31:31-33^{iv}). It is a covenant based on what Jesus did for us, conquering death and pouring out His Spirit, both of which happened on a Sunday. Instead of the last day of the week it was the first. It indicated a new beginning. Jesus became our Sabbath rest (Hebrews 4:8-10^v). We cease from our own labors and rest in His accomplished work. It is the same rest and celebration Jews experienced in weeklong wedding celebrations.

¹⁹ *And Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast."* Mark 2:19 Jesus explained with three parables, or you could say analogies. He spoke in parables so those who knew they were in spiritual poverty might see the rich truths He was proclaiming, while His enemies simply would not understand and would not be able to convict Him of what they thought was a religious crime (Matthew 13:10-12^{vi}). His parables are not about how to live a happy life, but rather about the of the kingdom of God coming into the world. This is about a new era that is the culmination and fulfillment

of the old era. The Baptist and Jesus preached, “The kingdom of God is at hand” (Mark 1:15^{vii}).

Jesus first used the example of a wedding feast. He was claiming to be the bridegroom, who is the center of celebrations in a wedding. The tradition was that weddings were a weeklong celebration. All of the groom’s friends would make merry with him for the entire week. *Rabbis declared that joy was more important than observing religious rituals*^{viii}. Religious obligations were set aside during that week of celebration. It was one time they could eat and drink their fill without thinking of labor or the duties of the Law. Jesus was saying it would be an insult to not feast at such an occasion. That is what Jesus’ three years of ministry were: the groom was with His guests celebrating the new covenant, the arrival of the kingdom of God, our union with Jesus our groom.

Most people must have interpreted His saying as simply a picture of their joy from being with Jesus, hearing His teaching, watching Him heal the sick and cast out demons. But for those with ears to hear there is much more. What does the Old Testament say about a bridegroom of the people? ⁵ *For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is his name; and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called.* Isaiah 54:5 The bridegroom of Israel is the LORD of hosts, the Holy One of Israel, your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth! That is what those who had ears to hear heard. Notice that Jesus does not specifically say He is the groom, though it is implied. He was not giving the Pharisees a reason to accuse Him of blaspheme.

John the Baptist understood the Messiah was the Groom. When asked if he was jealous of Jesus attracting bigger crowds than his, he responded, ²⁹ *The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete.* John 3:29 John came to prepare the way for the Lord. The Lord had come and was being united with His bride. Without getting into the tradition of that day, let me simply say that what John is saying is that he is the best man and in that role declares that the marriage has been consummated, which brings him great joy.

The great rabbi Saul we know as Paul understood this. That is why he said that marriage is a picture of Christ the groom and His followers as the bride (Ephesians 5:31,32^{ix}). He redeems us and washes us with His Word to present us to Himself as a radiant, spotless bride (Ephesians 5:25-27^x). The work to make us spotless had not yet been accomplished on the cross, but in the timeless realm of God it is a completed certainty (1 Thessalonians 5:23^{xi}).

But there is another bride and groom account in the Old Testament. Ezekiel 16 has the account of God telling Ezekiel to tell Israel what she has been like to Him. God tells of finding this pagan newborn discarded in a field lying in its blood. He cleans the baby and cares for her. She grows into a beautiful young woman, and He enters a marriage covenant with her. He provides her with beautiful clothing and fine ornaments. She became famous for her beauty, but then she became a whore with anyone passing by. She turned her jewels, gold, and silver into idols, and offered their children as sacrifices to those idols.

Then God turns all her lovers against her to her shame and the depth of her depravity is exposed. But the chapter ends with a promise of a new and everlasting covenant. God is the groom. The Israel of God is the bride (Galatians 6:16^{xii}). She was unfaithful and worshiped other gods symbolized by adultery. But there was a new covenant coming. It is one that Ezekiel predicted would be an everlasting covenant when God would dwell in our midst. The Lord will sanctify them and the one who is called Beloved/David will reign over them and be their shepherd forever (Ezekiel 37:24-28^{xiii}).

The groom had come for His bride and the people wondered why they would not fast. Jesus' declaration of being the bridegroom was a condemnation of their sins and an invitation to become the bride. This passage speaks the same invitation to us today. The Lord will sanctify us if we come to Him for forgiveness. We commit spiritual adultery when we put the things of this world as the desire of our hearts, when everything we have comes from Him (1 Corinthians 4:7^{xiv}). We make idols out of His gifts. We even give our children to our idols when we demonstrate we love God's gifts more than we love the Giver of the gifts, for then they follow in our footsteps. Thank God for the merciful invitation to enter the new covenant of grace that sanctifies us and makes our hearts inclined toward God and all His goodness (2 Corinthians 5:17^{xv}).

²⁰ *The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day.* Mark 2:20 Jesus predicted that He would be taken away and then they would fast. This is unusual as it is the guests who leave the wedding, not the groom. The Greek implies "taking away" is by force. I see two possible meanings or fulfillments. He would be forcefully taken from them, crucified, and laid in a tomb. During those few days we can be fairly certain that the disciples would not have eaten because of their great grief and fear that they would be arrested.

The other possibility which I believe is less likely is that of taken physically away in the ascension. Jesus said on the Sermon on the Mount that when we fast we should not look like we are miserable. He did not say "if" we fast but when (Matthew 6:16-18^{xvi}). He seems to indicate it should be a normal part of our spiritual life. Perhaps Jesus was speaking of both. We fast now to turn our focus away from the world and daily routines to draw near to our Lord and seek His direction.

Jesus gave two more illustrations for those who asked Him why He and His disciples did not fast. Each item, new clothes and wine, are essential parts of a wedding in Jesus' day. *Jesus had come to make all things new* (Revelation 21:5^{xvii}). *The Pharisees had assumed that the way to hasten and prepare for the coming of the new age was through stricter adherence to the old covenant. They did not seem to see that the coming of the new age was a gift of God's grace, not a response by God to Israel's faithfulness.*^{xviii}

²¹ *No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the patch tears away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made.* Mark 2:21 New unwashed material will shrink. If you patch a hole in old material with new material, it will shrink while the old material does not. As it does, it will rip the edges it was sown on. The hole will be bigger. What is Jesus saying? The sinners He is dining with are new to faith. Jesus' teaching is a new view of what is old. But the Pharisees still have an old view of the Scriptures. If they try to add Jesus' teaching to their old concepts, it only makes them worse.

Their old view is that the Messiah will come as a king and conquer their enemies and force those enemies to pay tribute. They believed that Israel will be blessed by His teaching and all disputes will be resolved and every descendant of Abraham will be abundantly blessed in this new kingdom. They could not see the Suffering Servant would come before the conquering King, nor could they see that the kingdom would include all people who come to God in faith (Isaiah 53:3-5^{xxix}; Genesis 12:3^{xx}; Isaiah 49:6^{xxi}).

The truth Jesus revealed is that He has come to find the people of the faith of Abraham to make up His bride (Galatians 3:29^{xxii}). He is seeking out those who recognize their need for forgiveness and long for God to change their hearts. They are the humble, the broken, the ones who have little hope in this world or religious routines. They are the new garment and His teaching is the new patch that covers the hole in their hearts that was created for Him alone to fill. They are not satisfied with this world and all it offers. They know there is more, and they find it in a relationship with Jesus.

²² And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins—and the wine is destroyed, and so are the skins. But new wine is for fresh wineskins." Mark 2:22 Jesus added one more illustration to drive the point home. It is another way to say the same concept. If you put new wine that is still fermenting in an old dry wineskin, as the gas expands inside the skin it will burst the skin. Then both the wine and the skin are ruined. If those seeking an earthly kingdom try to add Jesus' teaching about loving our enemies (Matthew 5:44^{xxiii}), they will be so conflicted that they will not know what to do. If they are seeking a physical kingdom and hear Jesus teach to give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, they will be conflicted (Mark 12:17^{xxiv}). We see this throughout Paul's letters when believing Pharisees come from Judea to Paul's church plants and try to tell the Gentiles that they need to be circumcised. It required a meeting with the Apostles and elders in Jerusalem to clarify that the new had come (Acts 15:13-17^{xxv}).

The "sinners" that Jesus was dining with are the bride He is seeking. They are finding peace as they come to faith in Him. They do not want to fast. They want to celebrate, like the tax collector Matthew did with his friends. They want to tell others of the joy they have found. The time will come when they will fast, but while Jesus is with them, they want to revel in the love of God and their new life. They want to ask Him questions and drink in His teaching. They want to, metaphorically speaking, get drunk on the new wine Jesus is freely pouring out to thirsty souls who had thought there was no hope for them. That they can be righteous by repenting and having faith in Jesus is a wonderful new patch to be celebrated. Now the Old Testament analogies all make sense to them. Now they can see what it was all pointing to (Acts 15:13-17^{xxvi}).

The old wineskins are afraid rather than joyful. What they are seeing in Jesus is threatening to their set ways and the pride they have in their rule keeping. The new wineskins rejoice in their relationship with Jesus. The old have faith in their efforts to obey the Law. The new could never consider fasting while He is with them. The old cannot celebrate His presence, because they do not understand the grace that is offering them.

I have heard these verses misused to promote some new teaching, or to say the new wine is the baptism of the Holy Spirit. If a person has never given their life to Christ

and received the Spirit then that could be the case. Or if they have faith in Jesus but never let Him be Lord of their life it may applicable. But what Mark is writing about is the difference from trying to be righteous by keeping the Old Covenant rather than becoming the bride by receiving the New Covenant.

The Old Testament is full of types and shadows and symbols of what was coming (Hebrews 10:1^{xxvii}). It predicts the New Covenant and Jesus as the suffering servant and Lamb of God (Genesis 22:8^{xxviii}). The many rules for the nation of Israel were to point them to man's inability to please God. They were rules that helped them stay healthy and for a just society, but the worship laws pointed to a coming Savior. The old wineskins thought that just trying to keep the laws meant they were good enough to please God. They missed how holy and righteous God is. They skipped over that verse that declares none is righteous, not one (Psalm 14:3^{xxix}). The missed, "*I am the LORD who sanctifies you.*" Leviticus 22:32b They puzzled at David's expression, "*In sacrifice and offerings You do not delight,*" and "*the sacrifices of God are a broken and contrite heart.*" (Psalm 51:16,17^{xxx})

Occasionally someone will come and tell me how the church has lost its way because we do not keep a particular law while they miss the whole issue of Christ having fulfilled the law for us (Romans 8:3,4^{xxxi}). Perhaps it is good to pour new wine into those old wineskins so they can be broken and made new. But then again, that is a work of God in our hearts. Only God can open the eyes of the blind.

Is Jesus with you right now? He is if you know Him to be your Savior (John 14:23^{xxxii}). Rejoice and celebrate His presence and goodness. Do you not know His presence? Are you clothed in the wedding garment only He can give (Matthew 22:11,12^{xxxiii}). Maybe it is time for a fast to turn our hearts from the temporal to the eternal (2 Corinthians 4:18^{xxxiv}). And to the broken and wounded who think there is no hope for you, listen to a few lines from a song. *Weak and wounded sinner, lost and left to die. Raise your head for loving is passing by. Come to Jesus and live*^{xxxv}. These verses are we are looking at today are inviting us to a feast, a wedding feast, where Jesus is willing to take us as His bride (Luke 14:23^{xxxvi}). Will you be His lawfully wedded bride (Hosea 2:19,20^{xxxvii})?

Questions:

- 1 Why did Jesus act in questionable ways?
- 2 What was the question and why was it asked?
- 3 What was Jesus' first parable?
- 4 How did it answer the question?
- 5 How did that relate to the Old Testament?
- 6 When is it appropriate to fast?
- 7 How do the next two parables connect to the first?
- 8 What was the second parable?
- 9 What do the old and the new represent?
- 10 Is your life a celebration of being with the Groom?

ⁱ **John 15:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.

ⁱⁱ **Acts 20:7 (ESV)**

⁷ On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight.

ⁱⁱⁱ **1 Corinthians 16:2 (ESV)**

² On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come.

^{iv} **Jeremiah 31:31-33 (ESV)**

³¹ “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. ³³ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

^v **Hebrews 4:8-10 (ESV)**

⁸ For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. ⁹ So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, ¹⁰ for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.

^{vi} **Matthew 13:10-12 (ESV)**

¹⁰ Then the disciples came and said to him, “Why do you speak to them in parables?” ¹¹ And he answered them, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. ¹² For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.

^{vii} **Mark 1:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

^{viii} David Guzik, *Mark*, David Guzik’s Commentaries on the Bible (Santa Barbara, CA: David Guzik, 2013), Mk 2:18–20.

^{ix} **Ephesians 5:31-32 (ESV)**

³¹ “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” ³² This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

^x **Ephesians 5:25-27 (ESV)**

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

^{xi} **1 Thessalonians 5:23 (ESV)**

²³ Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

^{xii} **Galatians 6:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

^{xiii} **Ezekiel 37:24-28 (ESV)**

²⁴ “My servant David shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd. They shall walk in my rules and be careful to obey my statutes. ²⁵ They shall dwell in the land that I gave to my servant Jacob, where your fathers lived. They and their children and their children’s children shall dwell there forever, and David my servant shall be their prince forever. ²⁶ I will make a covenant of peace with them. It shall be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will set them in their land and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in their midst forevermore. ²⁷ My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ²⁸ Then the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when my sanctuary is in their midst forevermore.”

^{xiv} **1 Corinthians 4:7 (ESV)**

⁷ For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

^{xv} **2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

^{xvi} **Matthew 6:16-18 (ESV)**

¹⁶ “And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ¹⁷ But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

^{xvii} **Revelation 21:5 (ESV)**

⁵ And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

^{xviii} Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001), 127.

^{xix} **Isaiah 53:3-5 (ESV)**

³ He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. ⁴ Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. ⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.

^{xx} **Genesis 12:3 (ESV)**

³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

^{xxi} **Isaiah 49:6 (ESV)**

⁶ he says: “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

^{xxii} **Galatians 3:29 (ESV)**

²⁹ And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.

^{xxiii} **Matthew 5:44 (ESV)**

⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

^{xxiv} **Mark 12:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ Jesus said to them, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” And they marveled at him.

^{xxv} **Acts 15:10-11 (ESV)**

¹⁰ Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?

¹¹ But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.”

^{xxvi} **Acts 15:13-18 (ESV)**

¹³ After they finished speaking, James replied, “Brothers, listen to me. ¹⁴ Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name. ¹⁵ And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written, ¹⁶ ‘After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, ¹⁷ that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things ¹⁸ known from of old.’

^{xxvii} **Hebrews 10:1 (ESV)**

¹ For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.

^{xxviii} **Genesis 22:8 (ESV)**

⁸ Abraham said, “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” So they went both of them together.

^{xxix} **Psalm 14:3 (ESV)**

³ They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.

^{xxx} **Psalm 51:16,17 (ESV)**

¹⁶ For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. ¹⁷ The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

^{xxxi} **Romans 8:3-4 (ESV)**

³ For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

xxxii **John 14:23 (ESV)**

²³ Jesus answered him, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

xxxiii **Matthew 22:11-12 (ESV)**

¹¹ “But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment.

¹² And he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless.

xxxiv **2 Corinthians 4:18 (ESV)**

¹⁸ as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

xxxv Untitled Hymn by Chris Rice

xxxvi **Luke 14:23 (ESV)**

²³ And the master said to the servant, ‘Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled.

xxxvii **Hosea 2:19-20 (ESV)**

¹⁹ And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. ²⁰ I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the LORD.