

The New Wine
Mark 2:18-22

Matthew 6:1-21
Jeremiah 31:31-34
Responsive: Psalm 34:1-7

Today we pick up where we left off last week here in verse 18. If you remember last week was the calling of the tax collector Levi, followed by fellowship at his house over dinner with other tax collectors and sinners, which both confused and angered the religious leaders of Israel. How could this Jew, eat and fellowship with those who have been outcast, with those who have dealings with the gentiles, with the liars, and the heathens? Jesus answered them in verse 17 telling that that he came to call sinners to repentance, not the righteous, just as a physician's purpose is to heal the sick.

What we have seen so far here in Mark with the rise of Jesus' ministry is both the awe which what he says and does strikes all those around him, and with the opposition he receives from the so called righteous ones. He was claiming that he was the promised messiah, and yet he constantly opposed them in their traditions, showing passion and love toward those that were outcast, and despised by the religious elite.

It is interesting that these laws and traditions that the Israelite's observed are ones that they were given by God, yet here on many accounts we see the God man break them. What does this say about the old covenant law? Is it binding in the time of Christ? Is it binding to Christians today? Do I need to remind you of our study in Galatians? Turn with me to Galatians chapter 3, starting in verse 19 reading through verse 26. So Paul answers this question, and we will see Christ's response to the traditions and laws as well in our study today. Spoiler, the answer to these questions is in verse 19, What purpose does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed, until Christ should come. And here in Mark, Christ has come, he is the fulfillment of the promises, he is the fulfillment of the prophecies, and he is the fulfillment of the law. And I suppose that brings up another question...how is Christ the fulfillment of the law?

Well once again, in Galatians chapter 3 we see that no one is justified by the law, obeying the law, keeping the law and traditions does not justify you before God, it is faith, in Christ, and it is only by his righteousness laid to your account can you stand justified before God. Galatians chapter 3, verse 11. "But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, and Paul quotes Habakuk here when he says, the Just shall live by faith. 12. Yet the law is not of faith, but the man who does them shall live by them. 13. Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us, for it is written, Paul quoting Deuteronomy here when he says, Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree. So you see, Christ has come and the law is fading away. The law was our tutor, its purpose was to point us to Christ, but now Christ has come we do not need to worry ourselves with times, and seasons, and festivals, and religious traditions.

And since we are here, talking about Paul's writing about the law to the Galatians let us turn over to chapter 5 as well where he says in verse 1. "Stand fast in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage." And he goes on and says, Indeed, I Paul say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. You have become estranged, distant, apart from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by the law, you have fallen from grace."

So we see, that righteousness was never about keeping the law, in fact the law's purpose was to show how impossible it is for man to become righteous on his own, and that he needs an alien righteousness, something outside of himself.

And that is why I think verse 17 here in Mark chapter 2, what Jesus says to his detractors is so powerful. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. Many of us have gone through a portion of our lives with little care over religious things, or some of us thought ourselves righteous even, or we considered ourselves good people. We could be kind, helpful, and even sacrificial in helping our friends and family. Yet all of that stands for nothing before God. Counting on the good works that we do for our justification is a false sense of security, as we see even following God's law, even being considered one of the righteous puts us apart from Christ, outside of the family of God. It is only those who have been adopted into the family, by God, through faith in Christ, whose sins have been covered by the blood of Christ can we stand as though one righteous before God.

As I said last week, the interesting sort of contradiction to verse 17 here is, even those that Christ calls righteous here, are sinners who need to put aside their self delusion of righteousness, their false sense of piety and holiness and come kneel before Christ. But we don't see that, we see them scheme and plot to have the messiah, the son of God put to death, because he teaches against them, he calls them out on their lies and false belief and misunderstanding of the law and the prophets. It was never about being justified by their actions, it was always about Christ coming to fulfill the righteous requirements in their stead. But in their arrogance and pride, they rejected him, the one who all of scripture foretold, the one who all the law and the prophets pointed to, they reject.

We need to examine ourselves, examine our lives and ask. Are we seeking to be justified by the good things we do? Or are we resting solely on Christ for our justification? Now I don't want anyone thinking that I am going way off the deep end saying that the law doesn't have a purpose, and that now Christ has come we can pretty much do as we please. As Paul says, Should we sin so grace can abound? Certainly not! Please do not misunderstand what I am saying here, just because we are no longer under the old covenant law, just because we are not justified by our actions does not mean that we have license to sin. The difference is we are not seeking to be justified by our actions, we are not attempting to gain favor with God by following certain moral code, or traditions. So I ask you, why do we do what we do? What drives us to live righteously if it is not our living righteously that justifies us?

It is because of Love, we live as we ought, we worship as we ought, we have compassion, we have grace, we live righteously because we love God and we seek to please him. We do not seek to gain favor, or build up brownie points, our motivator is our love toward him, which is just a pale reflection of the love that he first showed us. That is why we love the brethren, that is why we gather as God's people and fellowship and worship together, it is God's love flowing through us to will and to do that which is good, that which is pleasing to God. It is an understanding that we merit nothing in our own righteousness, we bring nothing but that which God has given us.

So I hope you can see as we have been going through Mark that Christ seems to have little care or concern over the traditions of the religious elite in Israel. The law was never meant to save as they believed, it never was meant to make them righteous, it was a tutor, given to point them to the fact that they could not be righteous and needed a messiah, needed Christ to come and impute his righteousness to them. But in their pride and arrogance, thinking themselves wise, thinking themselves righteous, thinking themselves favored by God, they saw Christ as a blasphemer, as one who has little care or concern for the old covenant law.

And that brings us to our passage in scripture today,. So let us read here, verse 18-22. So we see yet again another example of Christ and his followers not really being to concerned with the practices and traditions of the mosaic law. In verse 18 here we see 2 different groups that are being referenced, those who are the disciples of John, and the Pharisees. Both of these groups observe the fasting traditions of Israel and they question Jesus why he and his disciples do not. At this point, the Pharisee movement had been going on for nearly 2 hundred years by the time that Jesus arrives on the scene. Why today when we here the name Pharisee it caries with it the meaning of someone who is a hypocrite, someone who is self righteous but that was not the case at this time.

The name Pharisee meant separated ones, or holy ones. It was a Jewish movement that stem against the flow of the Greco-Roman influence on their society. Their life, and their focus was solely upon the Torah. It is approximated that the Pharisees only made up about 1 percent of the Jewish population. So even though they were a small group, their influence was very powerful among the people of Israel. James Edwards in his commentary says, “ The Pharisees were regarded as the authorized successors of Torah, who sat on Moses seat. The strength and adaptability of the Pharisees were proven by the fact that of all the Jewish parties, the Sadducees, the Essenes, Herodians, and Zealots they alone survived the war with Rome in AD 66-70. All Judaism subsequent to that catastrophe owed its existence to Pharisaic origins. The foundational beliefs of the Pharisees' which were expounded by an illustrious rabbinic dynasty known as the tradition of the elders. This included their belief in the sovereignty of God coupled with human accountability for virtue and vice, the resurrection of the dead, angels and demons and a scrupulous adherence both to the written Torah and to the oral traditions based on it, coupled with expressed disdain for those who were ignorant, negligent, or violators of the Torah.

Incidentally Jesus actually stood closer to the pharisee's then the other religious groups of his day, which is probably why they make up the majority of his opponents throughout his ministry. Jesus' constant debate with the Pharisee's was over the practice of the traditions and laws. The Pharisees were so focused and intent on the physical aspect of the law and traditions that they completely missed the purpose and intent of the law. By the time that Jesus comes onto the scene Pharisaism had turned into empty adherence to traditions, distorting the message of the law and traditions which we spoke of earlier turning it away from its purpose to point to Christ, and turning it rather into a seeking of becoming righteous before God by a strict adherence to outward moralism. In their pursuit of righteousness, in the focus of keeping true to the Torah they created even more regulations around it with an intent of honoring the Torah but effectively putting a crushing weight on all those around them which is evident by their reaction to Jesus and his disciples.

So we see now there are 3 groups here mentioned in verse 18, the Pharisee's, the disciples of John, and the disciples of Jesus. Marks recording here seems to hint that it isn't actually any of these other groups that are necessarily attacking Jesus and his disciples but rather it is those who are observing, the commoners who made up most of the large crowds that followed Jesus around. It is more then likely some of them that are questioning why his disciples are different then the others. This issue of fasting is a good example of the influence and hold that we see that the Pharisees had on the people of Israel. These people questioning here see this act of fasting has a sign or practice of true piety and holiness. So there is a sense in their questioning here as to why should they take them seriously if they won't even observe the basics of the religious traditions.

The practice of fasting was always surrounded by some observance of a past tribulation, or practiced during a time of trial and temptations. The Jews had at least 3 types of fasts, One type was a fast that was an observation and remembrance of national tragedies, such as the destruction of the temple by Nebuchadnezzar. Another was a fast in times of crisis, such as in times of war, plague, drought or famine. The 3rd type of fasting was personal, for any number of reasons, fasting and prayer during times of trial, or fasting during times of mourning. Out of all of these ritual fasting that was observed by the Pharisees only one was a required fast which was the fasting on the Day of Atonement. At the time of Jesus the act of fasting had become synonymous with religion, it had become a sign of atonement of sin and humiliation and was seen as an act of piety. But as we read in Matthew this morning, this type of fasting is hypocrisy and only serves to feed the pride of the one who is fasting. It is that false sense of piety, the seeking to gain reward and to appear righteous. Yet as Jesus said "When you fast do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.

It is against this backdrop of religious fasting, false piety and appearance of mourning that Jesus uses something that is the complete opposite. When asked why his disciples do not observe the fast that the Pharisees and the followers of John are observing, Jesus uses the festive picture of a wedding feast. Verse 20. "And Jesus said to them, Can the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them?" Weddings feasts were also a big deal in Israel, they would typically last up to 7 days during which would be filled with food, wine, song and dance. During a wedding feast even the rabbis were expected to put aside their duties to the Torah and join in the celebration. So as we can see Jesus using the wedding feast as his example has the effect of superseding their argument. This is not a time for fasting for the messiah has come!

Mark does not record what the reason for the observance of this fast was, but Jesus says that his disciples have no reason to fast since he, the bridegroom is with them, What we are seeing here is a difference of understanding on who this person of Jesus is. If the Pharisees and the disciples of John fully understood the significance of Jesus they would likely have understood why they should be celebrating instead of fasting. But in verse 20 he says "The days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days." This would have been a rather jarring statement, for in a wedding ceremony and feast it was always the guests who would leave but here he says that the bridegroom will one day be leaving. We already can see even this early in Jesus' ministry the urgency and forward momentum for he knows that he will be taken from them, and that he will suffer and die.

In the next verse here Jesus turns away from the discussion of fasting and starts into something new. Verse 21 and 22. "No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; or else the new piece pulls away from the old, and a tear is made worse. And no one puts new wine into old wine skins; or else the new wine bursts the wine skins, the wine is spilled, and the wine skins are ruined. But new wine must be put into new wine skins. As was his practice, Jesus used parables to explain truths about himself, and here is no different. In these examples we see both the new patch on the old wine skin, and the new wine inside an old wine skin being ruined and unusable. The new and the old is incompatible with each other. Both of these parables are in effect about the relation of Jesus to traditional Judaism. Jesus is the new patch, and the new wine. He is not an attachment or addition to the laws and traditions of Israel, no he is something new.

We see that in his teaching alone, everywhere he has gone so far he is met with marvel and the question, what is this new doctrine, or new teaching for even the demon's obey, and the lepers and lame are healed. He teaches like one with authority, even as one whose authority is higher than the scribes. It is not hard to understand why these Pharisees would hate him so, for they were strict followers of the old laws and traditions and here, the one claiming to be the promised messiah seems to have little concern over such things and claims that just like new wine must be in a new wine skin, and that the old wine skins have lost their usefulness so it is the same with the laws and traditions now that the bridegroom, the messiah has come. For all of these laws, all of these traditions served the purpose of pointing to the coming messiah, and now that he has come it is time for something new.

He has come to establish a new covenant with spiritual Israel, a new covenant in his blood, not a covenant of works as was the old, but a covenant of promise. Just as we read this morning in Jeremiah 31. "Behold the days are coming says the Lord when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord; I will put my law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Jesus is the fulfillment of Jeremiah 31, He is not a new patch added to the old, he is the new wine skin filled with new wine. The new covenant, the fulfillment of the law and the prophets. It is time to put aside the old traditions whose purpose was to point to the one who has come. We need to stop seeing Jesus as an amendment of the old testament, but rather that he is the culmination, the fulfillment of the old testament. Looking ahead to chapter 9, "Now after 6 days Jesus took Peter, James, and John and led them up on a high mountain apart by themselves and he was transfigured before them. His clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten them. And Elijah appeared to them with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, Rabbi, it is good for us to be here and let us make three tabernacles one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah. Because he did not know what to say, for they were greatly afraid. And a cloud came and overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud saying. This is my beloved Son, Hear Him!

The kingdom of God is at hand, the time of the prophets, the time of law, has come to an end, Jesus has come, hear him, repent, believe and follow him.