

Exegetical Notes, Mark 2:18-3:6
“Wrong Words, Wrong People, Now Wrong Actions”

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Mark 2:18-3:6

Verse 18

Now John’s disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. Some people came and asked Jesus, “How is it that John’s disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting but yours are not?”

- Certain religious feasts called for good Jews to observe fasts as preparation. Since John’s followers and the students of the Pharisees are both fasting, it is likely that this was one of those times. However, the Pharisees did observe weekly fasts and John’s disciples might have been fasting for some reason other than a Jewish feast.
- Fasting is abstaining from food for some specific religious reason for a designated period of time.
- Jesus’ disciples were not fasting.
- People asked Jesus why other disciples were required by their teacher(s) to fast but he did not require this from his.

Verse 19-20

Jesus answered, “How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them. But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast.”

- In Jesus’ day, as now, a wedding was a particularly joyous occasion. It involved a great party that might last as long as a week. Fasting had no part in the wedding celebration.
- Jesus compares his disciples’ joy at his presence with that of the guests of the bridegroom at a wedding. Since he was present, their joy was complete. There was no thought of fasting because he was with them.
- Jesus also said that there would be a time when his disciples would fast. It would happen when he was taken from them.

Verse 21-22

“No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, he pours new wine into new wineskins.”

- Jesus used two illustrations from life to help make his point about the behavior of his disciples. The first illustration was the sewing of an unshrunk patch on an old garment. When the garment was washed the patch would shrink and tear the old garment even more. The second illustration concerned wineskins and new wine. New wine, unfermented grape juice, was put into wineskins to ferment. As the fermentation process happened gas was produced that expanded the wineskin. New wineskins had never been stretched before. Old wineskins had already been stretched. If new wine was put in old wineskins the gases produced by fermentation would push the skin beyond its capacity. It would break and the wine would spill. Thus both the wine and the skins would be lost. Everybody understood all this.
- Jesus’ point was that the old religious forms, like the fasting of John’s disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees, would not do in light of his coming. New forms would have to be developed.

Verse 23

One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain.

- On a subsequent Sabbath, Jesus and his disciples were walking through a grain field. As they walked, they absentmindedly pick a few heads of grain and began to eat the grain.

Verse 24

The Pharisees said to him, “Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?”

- The Mishnah, the book of rabbinical laws, not the law itself, says that it is not legal to harvest grain on the Sabbath. Technically, that is what Jesus’ disciples were doing, harvesting grain. The Pharisees want to know why Jesus allows them to do so. The problem here, as with fasting, is that Jesus does not require proper religious behavior from his disciples.

Verse 25-26

He answered, “Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions.”

- The story about what David did is found in 1 Samuel 21:1-6. David was fleeing from King Saul. He and his men were hungry. Abiathar did not have food to feed them so David took the show Bread from the table in the Tabernacle and ate it and used it to feed his men. The Law of Moses reserved this bread only for the priests to eat. David’s action did not just break the Mishnah, the rabbinical law, it also broke the Law of Moses, God’s law.

Verse 27

Then he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”

- Jesus’ point was that the Sabbath was designed to help human beings spiritually. Its purpose was to give them time to properly worship God and to rest. Thus, it was designed by God to benefit humanity. However, the law of the rabbis had made the Sabbath a burden to men. Instead of it being a joy, it was too heavy to carry.

Verse 3:1-3

Another time he went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, “Stand up in front of everyone.”

- On another Sabbath day, Jesus went to the place of study, the Synagogue. There was a man there who suffered from some problem with his hand.
- Those who wanted to accuse Jesus of doing wrong were watching to see if Jesus would heal this man on the Sabbath day. The Mishnah also made it illegal to heal someone on the Sabbath day.
- Because Jesus knew that he was being watched, he decided not to hide anything. He made the man stand up in the front of the synagogue before everyone. Jesus did not want anyone to miss anything.

Verse 4

Then Jesus asked them, “Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?” But they remained silent.

- They remained silent because they still hoped to catch Jesus breaking the Sabbath law. But they understood that God never outlawed doing good, not even on the Sabbath.

Verse 5

He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored.

- Technically Jesus did nothing that was wrong or illegal. He did not do anything to effect the man’s cure except tell the man to stretch out his hand. None-the-less, the man’s hand was cured. Neither the Mishnah nor the Law of Moses was broken. But the man was healed.

Verse 6

Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.

- Jesus’ “wrong” action so angered the religious Jews that they began to plot together with each other to kill him.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *Wrong Words, Wrong People, Now Wrong Actions*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by *Cornerstone Fellowship & The Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen*. They are used here by permission.)