

## Jason Upchurch - Mark 2:18-28 - The Good News that It's All About Jesus

I don't know if you noticed that there is a theme in these two situations we're covering this morning; that theme is eating. And more specifically how eat relates to worship.

Eating and worship go hand in hand and as you may know the Bible has a lot to say about eating as it relates to our worship of the Triune God. Let me give you a handful of examples to get the idea of why what we're dealing with here is such a big deal.

First off, if you go all the way back to the Garden of Eden we have Adam and Eve and they are given one test. What does that one test revolve around? Food; eating. Do not **eat** of the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. They could have whatever they wanted in the most luxurious and fruitful garden ever made, but not from this one tree. Humanity was plunged into sin through Adam's disobedience concerning the eating of food.

God then curses the ability to even cultivate food because weeds and thorns will grow naturally and crops will take back-breaking work to grow.

Later we realize that eating is a very intimate act. God eats with Abraham and Moses. The provision of God in the wilderness was a provision of food and water. And really that provision from God was a test of faith for his people. Will Israel be content with the basic necessities that God miraculously provides every morning? And so often they failed.

Once Israel is in the Promised Land, God then regulates what the people of God under the OC could eat making a distinction between clean animals and unclean animals. To eat contrary to food restrictions is a sin. It's an issue of obedience and worship.

And not only did he regulate what they could eat, he also regulated **when** they could eat it and when they could cook it. Some of the feasts in the OT required fasting. Cooking on the Sabbath was forbidden so the Jews prepared their meals beforehand.

Nothing has changed in the NT. Food - because it is fundamental to our existence - is an issue of worship.

**1 Cor. 10:31:** Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God.

Even the act of eating and drinking is an issue of worship. On the one hand there are commands against gluttony and on the other commands against forbidding foods that God allows.

Jesus, talking about not being anxious, says in **Matt 5:25-27:** Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

A lot of anxiety stems from doubting God. We doubt that God will provide what we need - all the way down to food and clothing - and so we walk around anxious about everything. Will he provide for our needs? Answer: Absolutely. He provides food for birds and gorgeous colors for flowers and he loves us even more. He will surely provide what we need.

And, of course, we would be remiss if we didn't remember that eating is a sacred part of our worship every Sunday morning as we eat with Jesus. We commune with him spiritually over a meal while taking the Lord's Supper anticipating the true wedding feast to come with Jesus.

I think you get it: what we eat and how and our attitude toward eating is a big deal. It is tied to worship. It always has been and it always will be.

And as the tension is mounting between Jesus and the religious leaders here in **Mark 2**, the issue has to do with food. And it's actually not so much the food that is at issue. It's really that food is indicative of a much bigger change in worship.

So here's the big picture: Jesus is radically transforming how we worship God and that's seen in how we understand something as fundamental as food.

So in the first section we see that Jesus transforms fasting. And in the second section Jesus transforms the Sabbath. Both are brought about by food.

So let's walk through these 2 sections.

### 1) Jesus transforms fasting to revolve around him. Read 18

So here we get into fasting: the Pharisees and the disciples of John are fasting. What is fasting? Fasting is going without food for the purpose of prayer. In fact the phrase "prayer and fasting" is used throughout the Bible to indicate earnest prayer to God.

And the idea is that instead of eating, someone willfully forgoes a meal and uses that time instead for prayer. And the hunger pains you feel while fasting indicate the earnestness of your prayer.

For Christians fasting is not about losing weight or cleansing our bodies. It's about praying to God in earnestness.

Put another way: Whatever you are asking God for, you want that thing more than you want food.

Do you want God to provide a job? Do you want that job more than food?

Do you want a wife? Do you want a wife more than food?

Do you want a clean bill of health? Do you want to know God's will about serving in a particular ministry? Do you want to know whether or not to buy that house?

Do you want your child to come to faith in Jesus? Do you want your mom to come to faith in Jesus? Do you want those things more than food?

You might consider fasting for 24 hours and during that time you normally eat dedicate that time to prayer. It will fuel your seriousness in prayer. And throughout the Bible it is also a sign to God that we are serious about what we're asking for. It's not a way to manipulate God, it's not a way to ensure we get what we want. But it does show our earnestness.

It shows seriousness. You've seen people go on hunger strikes in prison or for political causes. Why do they do that? Because they are showing that the thing they are trying to achieve is more important than food to them. They are petitioning other people for change.

Well, when someone fasts they are petitioning God for change. If you want a whole theology of fasting you can read John Piper's book *A Hunger for God*.

The religious leaders of Jesus's day had made fasting a regular part of worship. They would fast twice a week. John's disciples fasted, the Pharisees fasted. That wasn't part of the Law per se, but that's what you did as an act of devotion and prayer to God. And we need to understand that this wasn't always a bad thing. It wasn't always a show.

John the Baptist is a godly man - his fasting was a good thing. The Pharisees were hypocrites but not all of them.

It could be a show to some people. Jesus warns us in **Matt 6:16-18** to make sure that we're not fasting so people view us as godly people. We don't go around advertising we're fasting or complaining about how hungry we are. Fasting should always be between us and God and if it is Jesus says that God will reward us.

So it's not a bad thing when done in sincerity of heart to fuel our prayers. It's what the people of God have done for thousands of years.

But then Jesus shows up proclaiming the Kingdom of God has come and one the chief earmarks of a devotion is fasting and he's not fasting. What's up with that? Why doesn't Jesus fast if it's a good thing to do?

Well he gives us 3 analogies to help us understand.

#### Analogy 1: Wedding. **Read 19-20**

This is actually a very loaded analogy.

Weddings in ancient Israel were really the most festive and celebrated times in Jewish life. The ceremony could last for a week and everyone in the community was invited to come and expected to celebrate. There was no mourning during the wedding feasting; people weren't sad, they were happy. There was food and wine and gladness. In fact, Jesus's first miracle in **John 2** was turning water into wine at a wedding feast.

Jesus is touching on a lot of realities here. First, what he's saying first and foremost he is the groom - Mark calls him the bridegroom. He is what everything is about. Eating or fasting all revolves around him. And since he's there with them, like a groom at a wedding, it would be inappropriate to fast. While the groom is at the party you celebrate. While Jesus was on the earth people were to celebrate.

Second, the reason the people of God have fasted in the past is because they are looking forward to the coming of the bridegroom. In the OT the people of God fasted as they anticipated Yahweh delivering them and saving them. They didn't even always know that, but that's why they did it.

And because of that, third, fasting is also related to mourning and sadness. Just like if you're sad or mourning the loss of someone and you don't feel like eating, fast is an act of mourning or longing. There is a sense in which fasting looks forward to seeing Jesus, but that means the reality is that he is not here. And so Jews for thousands of years fasted in anticipation for God's deliverance ultimately through Jesus.

Fourth, Christians are expected to fast as we look forward to the Lord's Second Coming. **Read 20**

Christians all over the world are given to fasting. Why? Because we are in a type of mourning waiting for Jesus to come again. The bridegroom has been taken away and we long for his return again.

In fact, the Didache - sort of an ancient Christian church how-to manual - says that Christians are not to fast like the Jewish hypocrites. The Jewish hypocrites fast on Monday and Thursday. Christians are called to fast on Wednesdays and Fridays.

Didache 8:1: "But let not your fasts be with the hypocrites, for they fast on the second and fifth day of the week [Monday and Thursday]. Rather, fast on the fourth day and the Preparation [Wednesday and Friday].

Early Christians fasted twice a week. It was just part of their practice as they anticipated the return of the Son of God and mourned his absence.

So what Jesus is getting at with this analogy is that all of history and theology revolves around him. All the people of God before him fasted anticipating him, and all the people of God after him fast waiting for him again. But during this brief time of his earthly ministry there is no fasting because the bridegroom was here and it was a time of joy.

#### Analogy 2: Patching Clothes **Read 21**

Now the 2nd and 3rd analogies are basically the same. But we'll break it down one at a time.

Most you know that when you have a shirt or a pair of pants and you wash them they shrink. Now let's be honest sometimes when our clothes shrink it's because the ice cream we're eating not the heat setting on the dryer.

But, the fabric gets smaller. If you have a rip in the fabric and try to sew brand new fabric on the old cloth what will happen is the newer fabric will shrink and pull the rip apart even more and the new tear will be worse.

What's the point of this analogy? The point is that Jesus is something new in God's economy. He's not just here to patch up Judaism. He's not here to just patch up the people of God. If he were to try to do that, it would be a mess. It would make the situation even worse.

No, Jesus is here to do something revolutionary. He is fundamentally changing the way in which people worship God. Like he said to the woman at the well: an hour is coming when people will worship God neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem but they will worship in spirit and in truth (**John 4:16-26**)

Worship of Yahweh under the OC was broken, ripped. There wasn't anything wrong with the Law - the Law was good and holy and true. The problem was the people were sinful and messed up the Law.

So Jesus isn't coming to patch up the Law. He's radically reorienting the worship of God's people to revolve around him.

Analogy 3: Wineskins. **Read 22**

So this one is very similar to the patching. Jesus isn't reusing the old system.

In ancient times the way you made wine was to stomp on grapes on a big floor - called a wine vat - so that the juice would come out. The floor would have small walls to keep the juice in and an opening in one area so the juice could drain out. You'd take that juice and put it either in a jar or a wineskin for it to ferment into wine.

If you used a wineskin what you basically had was a leather bag sewed together from goatskin - hence a wineskin. The juice would ferment inside the leather bag until it became wine. Well, while it fermented it would expand and stretch the skin out. Then when the wine was fermented fully, you would pour the wine out of the skin like we use a bottle.

But the catch was you could only use the wineskin - the leather bag - one time. The force of the fermentation actually stretched the bag out. If you were to try to use the wineskin a second time the force of the wine fermenting and pushing outward would rip the bag. You'd lose everything. No juice, no wine, no bag.

So you'd have to use something different. If you wanted to make a new batch of wine, you needed a new wineskin. That's exactly what Jesus says. **Read 22**

Jesus is saying that he is like new wine. What God is doing in him is something different than before. You can't jam Jesus back into the old wineskin of the Mosaic covenant.

Are there similarities? Is there some continuity? Sure.

Jesus says he didn't come to abolish the Law but to fulfill the Law. I think we all understand the moral precepts of the Law of God and utilize them well. So there are some connections.

At the same time Jesus is not here to give us Judaism 2.0. Everything about worshipping the true and living God now revolves around him. Even down to food and fasting.

We'll see in a few chapters that Jesus will declare all foods clean - there are no more dietary restrictions on believers.

And frankly you don't have to fast. Jesus says you should because you'll be rewarded for doing so. But there's no compulsion to fast. No command that we have to.

Jesus is transforming fasting. He's saying that in the Kingdom of God everything - food and going without food - all revolves around him.

I mean, think of that claim. Imagine if I said that to you. "Every meal you have, you can thank me for it. And you should be glad I'm with you. I'll go away soon and you'll miss me so much you'll start fasting again longing for my return." What an arrogant statement. Unless it's true.

And with Jesus it is true. Everything in the universe not only revolves around him, but is held together by him and the word of his power. And our fasting - and I encourage you to fast - revolves around him as well.

2) Next we see that Jesus is radically transforming the Sabbath. Read 23-24

Now, the presenting issue here is that the disciples are eating on the Sabbath. Really what they're doing in in the mind of the Pharisees is harvesting grain - they are working on the Sabbath. They're walking through grain fields, taking off the heads of grain. They're rolling them in their hands to separate the grain from the chaff and then popping the grain into their mouths for a little snack.

That was a no-no according to the Law. The 4th commandment is to keep the Sabbath holy:

**Deut. 5:13-15:** Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant, or your ox or your donkey or any of your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

The Sabbath was part of the OC Law. No work at all was to be done. What does work mean? Well, remember there was a man who was collecting sticks on the Sabbath to make a fire in **Num 15:32-36**? He was intentionally breaking the Sabbath to cook a meal and the people caught him. And the Lord himself specifically commanded Moses to put him to death.

For picking up sticks? On the Sabbath? Yeah. In defiant rebellion to God. The man knew what he was doing. This was not an accident.

Part of the reason for taking the Sabbath so seriously was the observing the Sabbath was pre-Law. The Sabbath was instituted before Moses on Day 7 of creation. God built in rest into the cosmos.

So suffice it to say that the Jews took the Sabbath very seriously. Absolutely no work at all on the Sabbath?

Which begs the question: what is work? You have to define that. How far can you walk, what mundane activities can you do?

What is work? Remember how I said the Jews built man-made commands around their God given-commands? Well in the Mishnah - sort of the Jewish rule book - there are all kinds of examples.

Mishnah Shabbat 7:2 there were 39 different tasks that were forbidden:

Planting, plowing, reaping, gathering sheaves of wheat into a pile, threshing your grain, removing the kernel from the husk - bingo - kneading dough, baking of any kind, no shearing wool, bleaching wool, tying knots,

sewing 2 stitches with a needle, trapping a deer, build a fire, can't put a fire out, can't carry an object from one building to another.

On and on. But they've got Jesus. Caught him red handed working. How can he be God when God puts Sabbath breakers to death?

How does Jesus answer? Maybe you boys should read your Bible. **Read 25-26**

So back in **1 Sam. 21:1-6** David and his companions were on the run from Saul. And he came to the Tabernacle and they were famished. So they ate the Bread of the Presence from the Tabernacle. That bread was only to be eaten by the priests. But the priests gave David and his companions the bread to eat because they were starving.

Why does Jesus bring that up? Because David broke the OT Law in relation to food laws. It was a flat violation. And get this: no one blamed him for doing it. Why not? Because it was the intent of the Law that mattered, not letter.

David and his men were famished from running across the country to get away from Saul. The only bread in the place was the show bread. It was either eat the Show bread or die. It's not a tough decision.

The Law never forbid eating on the Sabbath. And the Law itself never forbid snacking in wheat fields on the Sabbath - that was a man-made Law.

The only laws that Jesus is violating are man-made laws that the Pharisees and the scribes invented. He's not violating any of God's Law - that would be impossible.

Jesus and the disciples eating a snack on the Sabbath is not work. If they were laboring all day to sell the grain in the market, sure. But not this as they're traveling around.

Jesus gives 2 other principles here. **Read 27**

The first principle is that the point of the Sabbath was to be a blessing to man. God isn't this weird God who just needs a break from us working once a week so he sends us to our proverbial rooms to be quiet. He doesn't need the Sabbath. We need the Sabbath. We need to stop working. We need to take a break.

The Sabbath day was to be a blessing to humanity, not another burden. The Pharisees had made our day of rest a burden for people to follow. More rules, more observances.

Jesus says: no. That was never the design of the Sabbath. The Sabbath was a blessing by God to men. We are called to toil for 6 days. The 7th day is one of refreshment and rest and joy.

And I'm not a technical Sabbatarian where I believe we have to stop all work on Saturday or Sunday. But I do believe it's good for us to have some regular down time in our lives because we need it. People either tend to be lazy and do nothing or workaholics and never stop. Sabbaths help us remember to rest in God.

So the purpose of the Sabbath was for our benefit.

There's a second principle. **Read 28**

Jesus is Lord over the Sabbath. What does that mean? He's the final authority on the Sabbath. That's a big claim. Because up until this time the only authority on the Sabbath was God.

God regulated what happened on the Sabbath because God made the Sabbath. Even with the stick incident Moses didn't know what to do so he checked with God.

Jesus is saying: I have that authority. I have authority over health, over demons, forgiveness of sins, over the food you eat or fast from and I have authority over what you do on what day of the week.

That's pretty comprehensive authority. But that's the authority Jesus has in our lives. Jesus has rescued his people from endless man-made rule keeping and sought to bless us.

He blesses us as we pray to him and he blesses us as we rest in him. To him be the glory.

**Pray**