

Mark

Chapter Two

Introduction

If you ask the average person if it is more spiritual to feast or to fast, fasting would probably be their choice.

Jesus was *feasting* while others were *fasting*. When He was asked why, He answered by comparing His offer of the kingdom of God to a wedding. At a wedding, you feast; you don't fast! It is a time of joy, not sadness. As He put it,

Mark 2:19 "Can the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast."

This was a hard saying for the religious leaders of Jesus' day. Fasting was typical of the rigid religious ordinances they had established. The Law of Moses called for one annual day of fasting, on the Day of Atonement. But the religious leaders burdened the people by fasting twice every week, and by making a public spectacle of themselves while fasting. They put other burdens on the people as well. They added regulation after regulation to God's Sabbath Day, until it was a day of dread rather than one of devotion. Their idea of a relationship with God was more like a *wake* than a *wedding!*

Worse than the feasting itself was the fellowship Jesus enjoyed. He was fellowshiping with sinners. This incensed the religious leaders:

Mark 2:16 And when the scribes and Pharisees saw Him eating with the tax collectors and sinners, they said to His disciples, "How is it that He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?"

Jesus' answer reveals the very heart of the matter. At the end of verse seventeen He says, "I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." The religious leaders considered themselves righteous before God because of outward obedience to their many ordinances and observances. When Jesus calls them "righteous" He is describing their own, self-righteousness. The gospel message is

that there is none righteous, not even one.¹ All of your best self-efforts to be right with God fall short of His absolute holiness and perfection. You cannot ever *attain* righteousness; but you can *obtain* it! You can be declared righteous by grace through faith in Jesus. Instead of self-righteousness, you have what I call Son-righteousness. You have the righteousness of God's Son, Jesus Christ.

Self-righteousness and Son-righteousness are being compared in our text. We can put it like this: #1 When You Become Son-Righteous, Your Life Becomes A Spiritual Feast, and #2 If You Remain Self-Righteous, Your Life Remains A Spiritual Fast.

#1 When You Become Son-Righteous,
Your Life Becomes A Spiritual Feast
(2:1-22)

Salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus. In Second Corinthians 5:21 you read,

2 Corinthians 5:21 For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Jesus took your sin upon Himself. When He becomes your Savior, you are given His righteousness. You become Son-righteous.

Son-righteous sinners can celebrate, the way you do at a wedding. Some of the things you celebrate and are grateful for are pictured for you here in chapter two. They are *forgiveness* from sin, *fellowship* with Jesus, and *freedom* from the Law.

Son-righteous sinners celebrate forgiveness:

You see this in Jesus' healing of the paralytic man.

Mark 2:1 And again He entered Capernaum after some days, and it was heard that He was in the house.

¹Romans 3:10

Mark 2:2 Immediately many gathered together, so that there was no longer room to receive them, not even near the door. And He preached the word to them.

Rap singers talk about someone being "in the house." When someone is "in the house" they are more than just present; they are performing. Jesus was "in the house"; He was more than just present; He was performing that which He was anointed for.

What was He performing? He was "preaching the word to them." Mark constantly emphasizes the priority of the Word in the ministry of Jesus. We should do no less. Then, if God does more, we'll be blessed!

Mark 2:3 Then they came to Him, bringing a paralytic who was carried by four men.

Mark 2:4 And when they could not come near Him because of the crowd, they uncovered the roof where He was. So when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying.

The houses in Capernaum had flat, earthen roofs with tiles laid over support rafters, then packed with mud. Since roofs served as patios most houses had an outdoor stairway leading to the roof. This is an incredible scene! Just picture it - Jesus in the house, thronged with people, when suddenly debris starts falling into the house from the roof until a man is let down, probably by four ropes tied to the corner of his mattress, right in front of the Lord!

Mark 2:5 When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven you."

This man was carried along to Jesus when he could do nothing for himself. Jesus commends his faith, and the faith of his friends. Faith carries us along into the presence of Jesus when we can do nothing for ourselves, when we are spiritual paralytics. Men carried the paralytic to Jesus; God uses means to carry us to Jesus. His word, anointed by His Spirit, carries us to Jesus. "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."² God's Spirit anointed word comes to you in many ways...Especially by friends who recognize your helpless condition!

²Romans 10:17

Throughout this chapter mention is made of Jesus seeing the thoughts and the motives of hearts. When He said, "Your sins are forgiven you," He was responding to the thoughts and motives of this man's heart. I believe this man came to Jesus by faith seeking forgiveness for his sins. Forgiveness is not automatic; it is not unconditional. Not everyone is forgiven - only those who come to Jesus by faith, believing God to save them.

Mark 2:6 And some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts,
Mark 2:7 "Why does this Man speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

Scribes were students of the word. There were two main sects among the Jews, the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Both sects had scribes. There were scribes who were Pharisees, and scribes who were Sadducees. These are scribes of the Pharisees.

These scribes of the Pharisees were correct in their reasoning. Only the offended person can forgive the offender. In the case of sin, God is the offended Person; only God can forgive sins. They were also correct in their understanding of Jesus' claim. By forgiving sins, Jesus was claiming to be God - God in human flesh. They were incorrect only in their conclusion. Jesus was not "speaking blasphemies," because Jesus was and is God come in human flesh! Jesus is either liar, lunatic...or Lord. He would prove to them He was Lord.

Mark 2:8 But immediately, when Jesus perceived in His spirit that they reasoned thus within themselves, He said to them, "Why do you reason about these things in your hearts?"
Mark 2:9 "Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise, take up your bed and walk'?"
Mark 2:10 "But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins"; He said to the paralytic,
Mark 2:11 "I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house."
Mark 2:12 Immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went out in the presence of them all, so that all were amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw anything like this!"

It was easier to say, "Your sins are forgiven," than to say, "Arise, take up your bed and walk." It was easier to say, but harder to accomplish. So that they would know that Jesus could also accomplish what He had said, He healed the paralytic. The word for "power" is the word for *right* or *authority*. In this case, the outward,

physical healing was a manifestation of the inward, spiritual healing that He had the *right* to accomplish.

The universal, paralyzing disease afflicting the human race is sin. It is much worse even than paralysis; the Bible says elsewhere that you are born "dead in trespasses and sins."³ God in Jesus can forgive you your sins and give you eternal life. Faith in Jesus makes you spiritually whole and healthy.

The problems mankind faces today stem from indwelling, inborn sin. Those problems are only resolved at the Cross, and only for those who receive Jesus as their Savior from sin. Those who have can celebrate their forgiveness.

Son-Righteous sinners celebrate fellowship:

Man was created to have and to enjoy fellowship with God. The calling of Levi, and the feast at his house, is a picture of sinful man restored and enjoying fellowship with God.

Mark 2:13 Then He went out again by the sea; and all the multitude came to Him, and He taught them.

Again and again you must notice the priority of God's word. "He taught them."

Mark 2:14 As He passed by, He saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, "Follow Me." So he arose and followed Him.

The intent of His preaching and teaching was to restore men to fellowship with God. Levi, who we know by his other name, Matthew, was a despised tax collector. Tax collectors were and are despised for obvious reasons...But in Roman times, even moreso, because they were extortioners. They worked on percentage and could keep overages. Since they worked for Rome against the Jews, they were seen as having no hope of fellowship with the God of Israel.

Mark 2:15 Now it happened, as He was dining in Levi's house, that many tax collectors and sinners also sat together with Jesus and His disciples; for there were many, and they followed Him.

³Ephesians 2:1

Mark 2:16 And when the scribes and Pharisees saw Him eating with the tax collectors and sinners, they said to His disciples, "How is it that He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?"

Levi threw a party to say good-bye to his former life, and to introduce his friends to the One who had forever changed his life. Eating together is the symbol of sharing spiritual fellowship. As you partake of the same food and drink, you symbolize growing together in your relationship. That is why the religious leaders would never dream of sharing a meal with this crowd.

Mark 2:17 When Jesus heard it, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

When you realize you are sick, you go to the doctor. Sinners were coming to Jesus. The religious leaders were not. Sinners saw their need for a righteousness that only the Son of man could impart. The religious leaders considered themselves spiritually healthy in their own self-righteousness. They cut themselves off from feasting and from fellowship.

Fellowship with God is cause for celebration...

Son-Righteous sinners celebrate freedom:

These next verses describe the freedom Jesus Christ brings. Fast days and the Sabbath Day had been so formalized and regulated that the people were straining under a tremendous religious burden. Faith in Jesus Christ sets you free from the legalism of ritual and tradition.

Mark 2:18 The disciples of John and of the Pharisees were fasting. Then they came and said to Him, "Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?"

Mark 2:19 And Jesus said to them, "Can the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast.

Mark 2:20 "But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days.

John the Baptist had himself called Jesus the Bridegroom.⁴ You don't fast at a wedding feast! Everyone should have been feasting; the kingdom of God was at hand.

When Jesus was later rejected as King, the offer of the kingdom of God on earth was postponed. Jesus will return, in His Second Coming, to establish His kingdom on earth. In the mean time, feasting is in order. Fasting is practiced as a personal discipline; but when you are fasting, you are to do so in secret and with joy:

Matthew 6:16 "Moreover, 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.

Matthew 6:17 "But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face,

Matthew 6:18 "so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly."

The next two sayings continue the imagery of the wedding feast:

Mark 2:21 "No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; or else the new piece pulls away from the old, and the tear is made worse.

Mark 2:22 "And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine bursts the wineskins, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins."

Weddings were marked by *dress* and *drink* in Jesus day. In Matthew 22 you learn that the guest invited to a wedding were given a special wedding garment to wear.⁵ The garment represents the righteousness of Jesus - your Son-righteousness. With it you are welcome to the wedding feast; without it, clothed in your own self-righteousness, you are excluded and cast out of the wedding feast.

Jesus spoke of the folly of mending an old garment with a new patch. Shrinkage after washing would pull away the threads and ruin the garment. Jesus offers a whole new garment. He did not come to "patch you up" in your own self-righteousness. He did not come to reward you in your own self-efforts. He came to save you by offering you His righteousness.

⁴John 3:29

⁵Matthew 22:11-12

Weddings were characterized by drink. Jesus' first miracle was to turn water into wine at a wedding; wine was the preferred wedding drink. In making wine, the juice was put into a new wineskin, a flask made of animal hide. In the wineskin, fermentation occurred. The flexibility of the new skin allowed for the expansion that fermentation caused as gases were released within. After the wine had fermented, over time the skins would gradually harden. If you put new wine to ferment in old, hard wineskins, the gases from the fermentation would cause them to burst - wasting the wine.

The life-giving Spirit Jesus would pour into His followers could not be contained in self-righteous containers. Hard, self-righteous hearts must be softened by Son-righteousness in order to receive God's Spirit.

Nothing represented the self-righteousness of the religious leaders more than their rules and regulations regarding the Sabbath Day. God's Law prohibited work on the Sabbath, but it didn't give many specifics.⁶ The Jews, by tradition, had a list of thirty-nine acts that were strictly prohibited on the Sabbath. There were hundreds of other interpretive rules, regulating just about everything imaginable. For example: Healing a sick person was considered work, and was therefore prohibited on the Sabbath, except in life-threatening cases! The Sabbath Day had become a crushing burden, a symbol of self-righteousness.

Harvesting grain was prohibited on the Sabbath. That is the background for what you read next:

Mark 2:23 Now it happened that He went through the grainfields on the Sabbath; and as they went His disciples began to pluck the heads of grain.

Mark 2:24 And the Pharisees said to Him, "Look, why do they do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?"

Mark 2:25 But He said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he was in need and hungry, he and those with him:

Mark 2:26 "how he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the showbread, which is not lawful to eat, except for the priests, and also gave some to those who were with him?"

⁶Exodus 20:10. See Exodus 35:3; Numbers 15:32ff; Jeremiah 17:21ff; and Nehemiah 10:31; 13:15, 19.

Mark 2:27 And He said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.

Mark 2:28 "Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath."

The Pharisees considered what the disciples were doing harvesting! Jesus answered by pointing out that David had actually violated the letter of God's Law by eating bread set aside only for the consumption of the priests. He violated the letter of the Law, but not the spirit of the Law! The Lord would not have David and his men starve in order to fulfill the letter of the Law. If David could violate the letter of God's Law, certainly Jesus could violate a man-made tradition that had been arbitrarily added to the Law!

Jesus was pointing out to them the danger of legalism. Legalism always seeks to keep the letter of the Law by adding man-made rules and regulations. But, when keeping these to the letter violates the spirit of the Law, then it is legalism, it is evil. Jesus points out that "the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." In other words, God is concerned that you keep the Sabbath in its spirit - *not* that you be kept under bondage by the laws of the Sabbath. The Sabbath was meant to be a blessing, not a burden, to Israel.

Whenever we encounter the subject of the Sabbath I like to point out that you are nowhere in Scripture called to keep any Sabbath Day. The Sabbath was and is a covenant between God and Israel:

Exodus 31:16 'Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant.

Exodus 31:17 'It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever...'

As for you, a Gentile believer, the Apostle Paul says,

Colossians 2:16 So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths,

Colossians 2:17 which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.

You are set free from the Law, and especially from any man-made rules and regulations. Your freedom is a cause for celebration...

Son-righteousness is yours by faith. You have forgiveness of sins, fellowship with God, and freedom from the bondage of the Law and from all legalism. Some people would rather remain in their own, self-righteousness. The first verses of Mark chapter three tell you,

#2 If You Remain Self-Righteous,
Your Life Remains A Spiritual Fast
(3:1-6)

The attitude of these self-righteous Pharisees is typical of all those who trust in their own self-righteousness. Their regulation regarding healing on the Sabbath was more important to them than the suffering of the man with the withered hand. Self-righteousness prefers fasting; it prefers the outward formalism of putting others under heavy religious burdens. It is altogether evil.

Mark 3:1 And He entered the synagogue again, and a man was there who had a withered hand.

Mark 3:2 So they watched Him closely, whether He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him.

Mark 3:3 And He said to the man who had the withered hand, "Step forward."

Mark 3:4 Then He said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they kept silent.

Mark 3:5 And when He had looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts, He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored as whole as the other.

Mark 3:6 Then the Pharisees went out and immediately plotted **with the Herodians against Him, how they might destroy Him.**

These men were old wineskins in their hardness of heart. They were invited to the wedding feast, but refused the wedding garment. In one, telling moment Jesus exposed the evil of their self-righteousness.

Any righteousness that is not Son-righteousness is self-righteousness. Every religion and every belief system or philosophy that is not biblical Christianity is a system of works, and is therefore a system of self-righteousness. Such things seem good on the outside; these Pharisees were considered the most spiritual men of their day. But self-righteousness must be seen for what it truly is, for what it looks like to God on the inside. That's why Jesus said of these men in Matthew 23:27 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful

outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness."

The man with the withered hand was prohibited by the self-righteous system of the scribes of the Pharisees from reaching out to God. Self-righteousness keeps you from reaching out to God. Son-righteousness empowers you to stretch forth your hand to serve God.

Conclusion

The text in Mark is dealing with people who have never experienced Son-righteousness, but who trust in their own self-righteousness to save them. It is also true that many believers who have been declared righteous by God, who should be *feasting*, turn to *fasting*, thinking they will be more spiritual.

Like the Pharisees they practice an unbiblical form of separation from sinners, seeing themselves as better than others because of their spiritual heritage and traditions...

Like the Pharisees they make an outward show of their discipleship, in praying and in fasting and in giving...

Like the Pharisees they burden you with Sabbath keeping as an ordinance for the New Testament Church...

Don't turn the wedding into a wake!