

Mark 2:18-22 — Jesus Is Exclusive.

November 25, 2018

Open your Bibles to Mark 2. Take out your outlines. We are studying Mark 2:18-22.

While you are getting situated, I want to remind you the good news of Jesus that the Bible teaches, and that we believe, is an exclusive message. It is absolutely unique. The good news of Jesus is the only way to save lives.

That is not what you hear in popular culture. There is a bumper sticker on the back of cars today that says, “Coexist.” It



implies that all religions are essentially the same and they should be able to get along with one another. According to the Bible, that just is not true.

The good news of Jesus doesn't mix with other religions. It is completely incompatible with Islam, Buddhism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormonism, Judaism, what some Catholics believe and what most liberal churches believe.

In the other religions I mentioned, you try to handle your sin and be made right with God by your behavior. You try to behave your way to God. The problem is we keep doing what we don't want to do. No matter how much we determine to change our behavior to make good and right choices and to always say kind and right things, we just don't. We can't.

Jesus says the only way we are made right with God is not by trusting our behavior but by trusting in him. We trust that Jesus lived the perfect life we couldn't live and he died in our places to pay for our sins. When we trust what Jesus did for us, Jesus' payment for sin is credited to us and Jesus' perfect life is

also credited to us. All religions are not the same. All other religions are about us behaving right. Jesus is about believing in Jesus who behaved right for us.

Incidentally, this is the danger of interfaith prayer meetings. They assume everybody is relating to the same God. They are just doing it in different ways. That isn't true. The Christian faith is exclusive. Since it is about believing in Jesus, not trusting ourselves and our behavior, it is completely different from all other religions.

This is why the Bible is very clear there is only one way to know God and be forgiven of our sins, and it is through Jesus.

And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. Acts 4:12 (ESV)

This morning, the verses we will study in Mark give us a clear defense of the uniqueness of the good news of Jesus compared to the Judaism of Jesus' day, and by extension it tells us the uniqueness of the good news of Jesus compared to all other religions of today. Let me be clear.

Before we read the text, let me remind you what we studied last week in the verses before our text. Jesus called a repentant Levi to be his disciple. Ultimately, Levi became one of the 12 apostles. He also went on to write the Gospel of Matthew, which is the first book in the New Testament. Levi's story is the story of how God can take someone far from God and use him in an amazing way for God's kingdom. This morning, we are at the beginning of Levi's story. Jesus just called him to be one of his disciples.

What Jesus did by calling Levi to be part of his group was completely unacceptable in the minds of the Jews. The Jews in general, and the Pharisees

in particular, prided themselves on separating themselves from sinners. They wanted nothing to do with people who struggled with sin, especially great sinners, like tax collectors. The Pharisees shunned and ostracized tax collectors. They treated tax collectors like scum of the earth. They were considered traitors that were barred from the temple. They were the spiritual lepers to be avoided at all costs. The Pharisees taught a religion of separation from sinners and external acts of piety to be seen and admired by others.

Jesus grated every fiber in their beings when he called a repentant Levi, one of the worst kinds of sinners, be a one of his disciples. At this point, the Pharisees were beginning to conclude that what Jesus was teaching and what they were teaching was not the same thing. Jesus' teaching and the Pharisees teaching can't coexist.

Read Mark 2:18-22

This passage breaks apart under three headings. First, there is a question to Jesus, then an answer from Jesus, and finally two analogies that provide explanations for Jesus' answer. Let's begin by looking at the question they asked Jesus.

Jesus and his disciples were feasting instead of fasting.

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 (ESV)

In the Bible, most of the conflict with Jesus was built around questions people asked Jesus. Those questions usually surfaced because Jesus was violating one or more of the manmade pharasaical laws and traditions that were bolted to God's Word. That is what happened here. John's disciples and the

Pharisees were known for their fasting. Jesus and his disciples had just finished feasting. That didn't fit with their Jewish traditions.

You might be surprised to see disciples of John the Baptist involved in this scene. Subconsciously, we think all of John the Baptist's disciples followed Jesus, especially after John the Baptist clearly identified Jesus as the the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world. It is true that some people who followed John the Baptist shifted to Jesus. For instance, James, John, Peter and Andrew were followers of John the Baptist that shifted to Jesus. While some people shifted from John the Baptist to Jesus, that doesn't mean everyone who followed John the Baptist shifted to Jesus. John's ministry was calling people to repentance and to prepare for the coming kingdom of God. Many people went to hear John in the wilderness, repented and were baptized by John. They then returned to their lives in the city and never saw John the Baptist again. Since John the Baptist didn't have Twitter, Facebook, or Snapchat, most people lost touch with John and never heard him endorse Jesus. That left many followers of John the Baptist that never began following Jesus.

If anything, John's ministry encouraged many Jews to take their Jewish faith more seriously. That meant many followers of John the Baptist would have adopted the cultural practice of the Pharisees that were practiced in that day.

One of the practices of Jewish tradition that the Pharisees and the disciples of John the Baptist would have dutifully observed was fasting. That is going without food. Fasting was a common practice for the Pharisees. It was deeply embedded into Jewish tradition. Understand this in context. The

Pharisees and the disciples of John the Baptist were fasting but Jesus and his disciples just finished feasting at the home of a sinner. You can understand why many Jews thought something was seriously out-of-whack. Feasting with sinful people was unprecedented.

What does the Bible teach about fasting?

What does the Bible say about fasting? In the law of Moses, there was only one required fast for one day a year. It is found in Leviticus 16:29-31. It is known as Yom Kippur or the Day of Atonement. It was one day a year where you fasted to reflect on your sin and be genuinely heartbroken for your sin before you celebrated God's forgiveness of your sin.

In the Old Testament there were other occasions where people fasted, but they were voluntary fasts. They were not mandatory. All fasting was to be accompanied by a sorrowful heart that was repenting of sin and was seeking God's forgiveness after sin.¹ Fasting was also done in a time of crisis where people were praying and fasting as they asked God to come to the rescue. We still do that today.

In later Jewish history, some additional fasts were added, such as the fast of Purim in Esther 9:31, but fasting was never a mandatory constant practice. The law of Moses only had one fast for one day a year.

What traditions had the Pharisees bolted onto the Bible and treated as if they were absolute truth? At this time, Pharisees required fasting twice a week on Mondays and Thursdays. If you didn't fast twice a week, they didn't think you

¹ Esther 4, Isaiah 58, 1 Kings 21, Joel 1

were serious about your relationship with God. They thought God wasn't as pleased with your life as those who did fast. You can see this prideful twice-a-week fasting talked about in the Bible. Notice how this mandatory twice-a-week fasting produced spiritual arrogance instead of humility.

The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: "God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get." Luke 18:11–12 (ESV)

The Old Testament didn't require any of this. The Pharisees added it as a requirement to make them look good before God but in all honesty it was to make them look good in front of other people.

The Jews of Jesus' day practiced fasting, prayer and giving to the poor in a showy way to be admired by others.

There were three practices the Jews in Jesus' day followed because they thought it helped them gain favor with God but in reality they followed these practices to gain favor in front of other people. They were prayer, the giving of alms — which is gifts of money to the poor, and fasting. When the Jews did these things, they did all of them in a very public and showy way, which shows you their hearts were about impressing people more than they were loving God. Jesus addressed these three practices in his Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6.

Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. Matthew 6:2 (ESV)

When these people gave to the needy, they wanted a public announcement so everybody knew that they gave and how much they gave. Can you imagine someone with a trumpet blowing in front of him as he went to give

money to the poor? These people weren't giving in worship to God. They were trying to glorify themselves.

And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. Matthew 6:5 (ESV)

Can you imagine someone having a personal prayer time on the lawn of the Dickinson County Court house out loud? That is what these Jews were doing. They weren't trying to impress God; they were trying to impress other people and to be seen by other people. Jesus said that when we pray we should go into our closets and pray in secret. Our heavenly father who sees us pray in secret will reward us. Your personal prayer time is to be kept personal.

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. Matthew 6:16 (ESV)

When they fasted, which is something they wanted people to do twice a week, they would walk around town telling everybody how incredibly hungry they felt. They wouldn't comb their hair. They would dress like tramps and disfigure their faces so they looked like they were in pain. That way people would be impressed by the seriousness of their fasting and the severity of their fasting. In reality, they were fasting to show off in front of people, not to seek God's grace and favor.

What kind of sacrifice does God want in our lives?

What kind of fasting is God looking for? The answer is found in Isaiah 58.

"Why have we fasted, and you see it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it?" Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers. Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to hit with a wicked fist. Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high. Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a person to

humble himself? Is it to bow down his head like a reed, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, and a day acceptable to the Lord? "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard." Isaiah 58:3–8 (ESV)

In other words, God is more interested in his people helping free other people from the shackles of their sin. He is more interested in people sacrificing their time and their money to help the poor than he is in them depriving themselves of food. God is more interested in his people clothing the naked than he is in watching his people try and impress him as they go without food.

God is more interested in people doing what Jesus did when he went to a party at Levi's house so he could love sinners, help sinners and share the gospel with sinners than he was in seeing the Pharisees deprive themselves of food twice a week while they ignore the lost and hurting around them.

The Jews of Jesus' day were out-of-step with understanding Jesus and God's plan.

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. The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day." Mark 2:19–20 (ESV)

Jesus said the reason people were asking questions about his disciples not fasting was because they were completely out of step with what God was doing. You don't fast at a wedding. A wedding is a time of celebration, not a time of deprivation. There were even rabbinical rules in the time of Jesus that disallowed fasting at a wedding because there were some nut jobs who tried to do this. Can you picture how this happened in a wedding? It was the happiest

day of a new couple's life. The fattened calf was killed. Prime rib was served to the wedding guests and the best man in the wedding had an amazing dinner in front of him, but he refused to touch it. He just stared at it while people stared at him in disbelief. Why wouldn't he eat it? It was Thursday. He had to fast. How selfish and insulting it was to the couple. He was out of step with what was happening. He needed to join in the celebration, not selfishly ruin the celebration by concerning himself with fasting.

The rabbis disallowed fasting at a wedding because it stole joy from the wedding. Remember that in the ancient world, a wedding was not a one-day event. It was a week-long party where the bride and groom were treated like a king and queen. They were to eat and enjoy as much food as possible. If the bride still fit in her wedding dress after the week-long party, something was wrong. A wedding was to be the happiest week-long celebration of a new couple's life. Fasting at a wedding was completely out of step with what was happening. It was insulting to the couple that invited you.

Jesus said his arrival was like a wedding. The coming of the Son of Man was anticipated with great joy by all the prophets. That joyous day was there. Jesus' kingdom was breaking into this world. Thousands of people were being healed from sickness. Demons were cast out. The kingdom of God was trampling of the reign and rule of Satan in this world. It was a time for celebrating, not fasting and denying yourself. When raising questions about fasting, the religious leaders showed themselves to be completely out of touch with God's program.

Jesus then said the days were coming when the bridegroom would be taken away. That would be a time of sorrow and Jesus' disciples would fast in that day. The Greek word for taken away is the word *epairo*. It refers to a sudden taking away. A similar expression was used to describe the death of Jesus in Isaiah 53.

By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? Isaiah 53:8 (ESV)

When Jesus was taken away to the cross, do you think the disciples were fasting when he was crucified? I am sure they did. Their fasting wasn't empty ritualistic fasting because it was Monday or Thursday. It was genuine heartfelt fasting, asking God to intervene.

To make it clear that the practices of Judaism in Jesus' day were completely out-of-step with the gospel, Jesus gave us two clarifying analogies.

The good news of Jesus can't fix your religion. It can only replace your religion.

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. 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 2:21–22 (ESV)

Anybody who washes clothing made of natural fabric, like cotton or wool, knows about shrinkage. When I was in college, my grandmother once washed my favorite sweater and literally shrunk it so much it fit on a doll. I didn't know things could shrink that much. In the ancient world, there were no synthetics so everything shrunk when washed. Jesus said you would never take a piece of unshrunk cloth and use it to patch a hole in a piece of shrunk cloth. When that

unshrunk piece of cloth became wet and dried, it would shrink and tear an even bigger hole.

Jesus said the rituals, ceremonies and extra rules of Judaism in his day are like an old, worn-out garment. You can't patch the holes in Judaism with a piece of the gospel. Jesus didn't come to patch up the old religious system of Judaism. He came with an entirely new way to relate to God.

That is why when we take communion and repeat the words Jesus gave us on the night he was betrayed we say, "This cup is the new covenant, which is in my blood." The old covenant given to Moses on Mount Sinai was based on what you did. Cultural Judaism had added even more things to do. Jesus said, "I come with an entirely new covenant that is not based on what you must do but is based on what I have done for you." The two don't mix. One is trusting in yourself and your works. The other is trusting in Jesus and his work for you. They are incompatible. You can't patch your works-based religion with Jesus. You need to let go of all your works-based religion and trust in Jesus.

Jesus then gave another analogy. This time he talked about new wineskins and old wineskins. In the ancient world, when it came to fermenting wine, they didn't have bottles. They used goat skins. You would skin the animal and try to keep the skin as intact as possible. They would sew closed the leg holes and any other holes in the hide using the neck area as your spout. As the wine fermented, the skin expanded and stretched. You couldn't reuse an old wine skin with new wine because the elasticity of the skin was gone. If you put new

wine into old wineskins the fermenting would burst the skins and you would lose everything.

Jesus said Judaism is like an old wineskin. You can't add the gospel to it without destroying it. They are completely incompatible. You have to let go of your old religion and your old way of think about pleasing God by what you do when you come to Jesus. People who were more worried about fasting because it was Monday and Thursday when Jesus was there healing and giving life were out-of-step with what God was doing through Jesus. They were not compatible.

I don't know where you are in life this morning but don't think you can simply add Jesus to your religion or add Jesus as an accessory to your life. You can't. Jesus is a total replacement. It is letting go what you think you need to do to be made right with God and then trusting in what Jesus has done for you. Remember that Jesus came to give us a relationship with God that is completely new and is based on what Jesus did for us.

And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. Acts 4:12 (ESV)

The Gospel of Luke also tells us about this encounter with Jesus over fasting. Luke told us Jesus added a few extra words that Mark and Matthew omitted in their accounts.

And no one after drinking old wine desires new, for he says, "The old is good." Luke 5:39 (ESV)

This is very insightful. Jesus said it is very natural for people to hang onto their religion because it is familiar, like drinking old wine. Even when there is something new and better, people love to hang onto the old.

This is exactly what was happening to the Jews in Jesus' day. God provided a new and better way to know him based on trust in Jesus instead of ourselves. Even though the good news was available, many Jews refused to receive it because they liked what was old and familiar, though it was inferior.

Anyone who has spent years in a false religion is familiar with this struggle to leave their old ways for Jesus. Anyone who has grown up with extra biblical traditions also faces this challenge. It is easy to elevate our traditions over simple faith and trust in Jesus. When we bolt our traditions onto Jesus, treating them as important as Jesus, we distract from Jesus and take people away from him.

Application

Remember that Jesus is exclusive. Faith in him is the only way to be forgiven and made right with God. We can't patch him into another religion or our manmade worship. We need to trust in Jesus alone.



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