

THE
GOSPEL
OF
MARK

2017 STUDY NOTES
PART 2

Getting Started

Remember to start and finish with prayer.

to kick off...

1. Think of a religious tradition that you think sucks the joy out of life? What makes it so enfeebling?

fasting

According to the Old Testament law, there is only one prescribed fast for all the people of Israel on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:29-31). The point of this fast was to facilitate the inward identifying of one's life to the life of the sacrificial animal given in their place as a propitiation, ie that which turns God's anger at sin away. After the exile to Babylon, it seems four more fasts were attached to certain festivals anticipating the renewal of God's people and kingdom in the promised land (Zechariah 8:12-13). Finally, during the reign of the Persia/Media Empire under King Xerxes the festival of Purim was established in commemoration of the Israelite community saved from annihilation in a foreign land which included fasting as something of a petition to God (Esther 4:15-16 and 9:31). However, the Pharisees of Jesus' day had gone way beyond the Old Testament requirements when it came to fasting with twice-weekly fasts (Luke 18:12). The purpose of all these fasts is unclear. However, for the large part it would seem that the fasting of John's disciples and the Pharisees was utilised in an expression of anticipating and/or petitioning God's renewal and restoration of the kingdom of Israel. Given the precedent of fasting in connection to the loss of a loved one (see 1 Samuel 31:13, Psalm 35:13-14), it may also be that John's disciples fasted over John's imprisonment and execution (Mark 1:14).

Read Mark 2:18-20 below

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?"

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."

2. Why is it inappropriate at this time for Jesus' disciples to fast? When will it be appropriate?

3. What does this suggest about Jesus' understanding of the place and purpose of fasting? (see Mark 1:14-15)

4. In what sense then is Jesus referring to himself as the bridegroom? How might this impact on whether Christians fast or not today?

Read the following Bible passages and note the subsequent questions.

In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. Acts 13:1-3

Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust. Acts 14:23

[God says:]

*Is this the kind of fast I have chosen,
only a day for a man to humble himself?
Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed
and for lying on sackcloth and ashes?*

*Is that what you call a fast,
a day acceptable to the LORD?*

*"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:
to loose the chains of injustice*

*and untie the cords of the yoke,
to set the oppressed free
and break every yoke?*

*Is it not to share your food with the hungry
and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—
when you see the naked, to clothe him,
and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?
Isaiah 58:5-7*

5. For what other purposes might God's people fast this side of Jesus' death and resurrection?

Read Colossians 2:13-23 below

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, 14 having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. 15 And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

16 Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. 17 These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. 18 Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. 19 He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.

20 Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: 21 "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? 22 These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. 23 Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

6. What can fasting never be about for a Christian?

Read Mark 2:21-22 below

“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.”

7. What do you think the patch of unshrunk cloth and the old garment are references to?

8. What do you think the new wine and the old wineskins are references to?

9. Is the ‘old’ bad? What is the real problem?

10. What do you think is the point Jesus is making here?

think about it...

11. Do you know any religious traditions that suck the joy out of the gospel?

12. Think of some established traditions that attempt to enjoy the gospel. Assess the pros and cons of those traditions.

13. Think of one of your favourite teachings from Jesus and concoct a tradition from it that celebrates the joy of the gospel:

at home

at work

at church

personally

Pray

... for the link missionary and church ministry your growth group has adopted for this term.

Getting Started

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to kick off...

1. What are some of the “rules” we all follow when we meet together as God’s people?

Read Exodus 20:8-11 below

“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. 11 For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

2. Who is the Lord of the Sabbath?

3. What is forbidden on the Sabbath? Why?

While the Old Testament contains illustrations of sabbath prohibitions such as preparing food, gathering sticks and engaging in trade (eg Exodus 16:22-30, Numbers 15:32-36 and Nehemiah 10:31; 13:15-22), they do not constitute a comprehensive definition of ‘work’. Not surprisingly then, a fuller definition was soon felt. Enter the Pharisees. They developed a definition of ‘work’ into a luxuriant growth of case law, ultimately codified in the Mishnah¹ which included “reaping”, hence the objection in Mark 2:23-24.

¹ the edited record of the complex body of material known as the Oral Torah that was transmitted in the aftermath of the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 AD

Read Mark 2:23-28 below

One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. 24 The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?"

25 He answered, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? 26 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."

27 Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. 28 So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

4. What are the Pharisees accusing Jesus of?

5. What does Jesus turn to to refute the traditions of the Pharisees? What is the significance of this?

Read 1 Samuel 21:1-9 below noting that Ahimelech was Abiathar's father.

David went to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest. Ahimelech trembled when he met him, and asked, "Why are you alone? Why is no one with you?"

2 David answered Ahimelech the priest, "The king charged me with a certain matter and said to me, 'No one is to know anything about your mission and your instructions.' As for my men, I have told them to meet me at a certain place. 3 Now then, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever you can find."

4 But the priest answered David, "I don't have any ordinary bread on hand; however, there is some consecrated bread here—provided the men have kept themselves from women."

5 David replied, "Indeed women have been kept from us, as usual whenever I set out. The men's things are holy even on missions that are not holy. How much more so today!" 6 So the priest gave him the consecrated bread, since there was no bread there except the bread of the Presence that had been removed from before the LORD and replaced by hot bread on the day it was taken away.

7 Now one of Saul's servants was there that day, detained before the LORD; he was Doeg the Edomite, Saul's head shepherd.

8 David asked Ahimelech, "Don't you have a spear or a sword here? I haven't brought my sword or any other weapon, because the king's business was urgent."

9 The priest replied, "The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you killed in the Valley of Elah, is here; it is wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod. If you want it, take it; there is no sword here but that one."

David said, "There is none like it; give it to me."

In fleeing from a jealous and murderous King Saul, David begins his life on the run by duping the priest Ahimelech into furnishing him with food and weapons. However, as Jesus notes the consecrated bread was lawful only for priests to eat, and yet David acquires it without argument, and in so doing the narrative suggests a tacit approval of his actions, simply because of who he is.

6. Who is David?

7. In identifying with David here, what does Jesus understand about the nature of his own authority?

8. What does Jesus mean that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath?

Read Daniel 7:13-14 below and note the following question

"In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. 14 He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

9. What does it mean for Jesus to be the Son of Man?

10. Who is the Lord of the Sabbath?

Read Mark 3:1-6 below

Another time he went into the synagogue, and a man with a shrivelled hand was there. 2 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. 3 Jesus said to the man with the shrivelled hand, "Stand up in front of everyone."

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.

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

11. Why do you think Jesus healed the man on this day?

The Herodians were the supporters and adherents of a leading political figure at the time, Herod Antipas. The Herod family controlled the appointment of High Priests before 6AD, and so its no surprise then that the Pharisees and the Herodians were in bed together in their opposition to Jesus - he was breaking the rules they all happily lived by and for and used to maintain their authority.

12. Given Jesus' question of verse 4, what is ironic about the Pharisees and the Herodians plotting?

Read Mark 15:31-32 below and note the following question

In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! 32 Let this Christ, this King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe."

13. What is the further irony in Jesus' statement of Mark 3:4 given the very same religious authorities ultimately succeed in their plot?

to finish up...

In attempting to finely define 'work' in the service of being able to do the Sabbath, the Pharisees particularly lost sight of the wood for the trees - that people are more important than rules. Worse, their love for rules lead them to despise the Lord of the Sabbath. God forbid we fall prey to a similar stubborn heartedness!

14. Think about those who get in the way of you enjoying church. What is it about them that break the "rules" for you?

15. Think of some specific ways in which you might love them for Jesus' sake.

Pray

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