

Discussion Guide and Commentary for: Mark 2:15 -3:19

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Eating with Sinners (Mark 2:15–17)

- **What stands out to you** about the people Jesus chose to eat with in Levi's house?
- How do the **religious leaders (scribes and Pharisees)** react to Jesus, and why are they offended by His guest list?
- When Jesus says the "sick" need a doctor, what does that teach us about **how we should view our own sin** versus the sin of others?
- In what practical ways can your group **break down social barriers** to love and reach out to marginalized people, without compromising your faith?

Questions About Fasting (Mark 2:18–22)

- Why were the disciples of John and the Pharisees fasting, but **Jesus' disciples were not**?
- What does Jesus mean by comparing Himself to the **bridegroom**? How does His presence change the atmosphere of mourning into celebration?
- What do the parables of the **new patch on an old garment** and **new wine in old wineskins** teach us about the new life Jesus brings? How do we sometimes try to fit Jesus into our old routines?

Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:23–3:6)

- Why were the Pharisees **watching Jesus so closely** regarding the grainfields and the man with the shriveled hand on the Sabbath?
- What is the core truth behind Jesus' statement that **"the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath"**?
- Does this mean that there is no place for honor and priority toward God on the Sabbath day? What place does work have on Sundays for us as Christians? Does Matthew 6:33 play into this issue?
- How does Jesus feel in Mark 3:5 (**anger and deep distress** at their stubborn hearts), and how do we sometimes display that same hardness of heart today?
- Why do the religious leaders immediately begin **plotting with the Herodians** to kill Jesus over an act of healing and mercy?

Crowds and Appointing the Twelve (Mark 3:7–19)

- Why do you think **massive crowds** from all over the region (Galilee, Judea, Jerusalem, Tyre, and Sidon) kept rushing to Jesus?
- Jesus goes up a mountain and **calls those He wanted** to be with Him (the Twelve Apostles). What does this appointment tell us about the **purpose of discipleship**—first being *with* Him, and then being sent out?
- Looking at the diverse group of men Jesus chose (including a zealot and a tax collector), what does this say about **who Jesus calls** into His kingdom?

COMMENTARY

2:15 A banquet was arranged at **Levi's house** so he could introduce his friends to the Lord Jesus. Most of his friends were like himself—**tax-collectors and sinners**. Jesus accepted the invitation to be present with them.

2:16 The **scribes and Pharisees** thought they had caught Him in a serious fault. Instead of going directly to Him, they went **to His disciples** and tried to undermine their confidence and loyalty. **How** was it **that** their Master ate and drank **with tax-collectors and sinners**?

2:17 **Jesus heard it** and reminded them that healthy people don't need a doctor—only those who are ill. The scribes thought they were **well**, therefore they did not recognize their need of the Great Physician. The tax-collectors and sinners admitted their guilt and their need of help. Jesus came to call sinners like them—not self-righteous people.

There is a lesson in this for us. We should not shut ourselves up in Christianized communities. Rather we should seek to befriend the ungodly in order to introduce them to our Lord and Savior. In befriending sinners, we should not do anything that would compromise our testimony, nor allow the unsaved to drag us down to their level. We should take the initiative in guiding the friendship into positive channels of spiritual helpfulness. It would be easier to isolate oneself from the wicked world, but Jesus didn't do it, and neither should His followers.

The scribes thought they would ruin the Lord's reputation by calling Him a friend of sinners. But their intended insult has become an endearing tribute. All the redeemed gladly acknowledge Him as the friend of sinners, and will love Him eternally for it.

J. Controversy about Fasting (2:18–22)

2:18 The **disciples of John the Baptist and of the Pharisees** practiced **fasting** as a religious exercise. In the OT, it was instituted as an expression of deep sorrow. But it had lost much of its meaning and had become a routine ritual. They noticed that Jesus' **disciples** did **not fast**, and perhaps there was a twinge of envy and self-pity in their hearts when they asked the Lord for an explanation.

2:19, 20 In reply, He compared His disciples to companions of a **bridegroom**. He Himself was the Bridegroom. **As long as** He was with them, there was no occasion for an outward demonstration of sorrow. **But the days** were coming when He would **be taken away; then they** would have occasion to **fast**.

2:21 Immediately the Lord added two illustrations to announce the arrival of a New Era which was incompatible with the previous one. The first illustration involved a new patch made of **cloth** that has not been shrunk. If used to repair **an old garment**, it will inevitably shrink and something will have to give. The garment, made of older cloth, will be weaker than the patch and will tear again wherever the patch is sewed to it. Jesus was comparing the Old Dispensation to the old garment. God never intended Christianity to patch up Judaism; it was a new departure. The sorrow of the Old Era, expressed in fasting, must give way to the joy of the New.

2:22 The second illustration involved **new wine** in **old wineskins**. The leather wineskins lost their power to stretch. If **new wine** was put into them, the pressure built up by the fermentation would burst the skins. The **new wine** typifies the joy and power of the Christian faith. The **old wineskins** depict the forms and rituals of Judaism. New wine needs new skins. It was no use for

John's disciples and the Pharisees to put the Lord's followers under the bondage of sorrowful fasting, as it had been practiced. The joy and effervescence of the new life must be allowed to express themselves. Christianity has always suffered from man's attempt to mix it with legalism. The Lord Jesus taught that the two are incompatible. Law and grace are opposing principles.

K. Controversy about the Sabbath (2:23–28)

2:23, 24 This incident illustrates the conflict Jesus had just taught between the traditions of Judaism and the liberty of the gospel.

As **He went through the grain-fields on the Sabbath, ... His disciples** picked some **grain** to eat. This didn't violate any law of God. But according to the hair-splitting traditions of the elders, the disciples had broken the Sabbath by "reaping" and perhaps even by "threshing" (rubbing the grain in their hands to remove the husks)!

2:25, 26 The Lord answered them using an incident in the OT. **David**, though anointed as king, had been rejected, and instead of reigning, was being hunted like a partridge. One day when his provisions were gone, **he went to the house of God and used the showbread** to feed his men and himself. Ordinarily this showbread was forbidden to any but the priests, yet David was not rebuked by God for doing this. Why? Because things were not right in Israel. As long as David was not given his rightful place as king, God allowed him to do what ordinarily would be illegal.

This was the case with the Lord Jesus. Though anointed, He was not reigning. The very fact that His disciples had to pick grain as they traveled showed that things were not right in Israel. The Pharisees themselves should have been extending hospitality to Jesus and His disciples instead of criticizing them.

If David had actually broken the law by eating the showbread, yet was not rebuked by God, how much more blameless were the disciples who, under similar circumstances, had broken nothing but the traditions of the elders.

Verse 26 says that David **ate the showbread** when **Abiathar** was **high priest**. According to 1 Samuel 21:1, Ahimelech was priest at the time. Abiathar was his father. It may be that the high priest's loyalty to David influenced him to permit this unusual departure from the law.

2:27, 28 Our Lord closed His discourse by reminding the Pharisees that **the Sabbath** was instituted by God for man's benefit, not for his bondage. He added that **the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath**—He had given the Sabbath in the first place. Therefore He had authority to decide what was permissible and what was forbidden on that day. Certainly the Sabbath was never intended to prohibit works of necessity or deeds of mercy. Christians are not obligated to keep the Sabbath. That day was given to the nation of Israel. The distinctive day of Christianity is the Lord's Day, the first day of the week. However, it is not a day encrusted with legalistic do's and don't's. Rather it is a day of privilege when, free from secular employments, believers may worship, serve, and attend to the culture of their souls. For us it is not a question, "Is it wrong to do this on the Lord's Day?" but rather "How may I best use this day to the glory of God, to the blessing of my neighbor, and to my spiritual good?"

L. The Servant Heals on the Sabbath (3:1–6)

3:1, 2 Another test case arose on the Sabbath. As Jesus **entered the synagogue again**, He met **a man with a withered hand**. This raised the question, “**Would Jesus heal him on the Sabbath?**” If He did, the Pharisees would have a case against Him—or so they thought. Imagine their hypocrisy and insincerity. They couldn’t do anything to help this man, and they resented anyone who could. They sought some ground on which to condemn the Lord of life. If He healed **on the Sabbath**, they would rush in to the kill like a pack of wolves.

3:3, 4 The Lord told **the man to step forward**. The atmosphere was charged with expectancy. **Then He said to the Pharisees, “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?”** His question revealed the Pharisees’ wickedness. They thought it was wrong for Him to perform a miracle of healing on the Sabbath, but not wrong for them to plan His destruction on the Sabbath!

3:5 No wonder they didn’t answer! After an embarrassed silence, the Savior ordered the man to **stretch out his hand**. As he did so, full strength returned, the flesh filled out to normal size, and the wrinkles disappeared.

3:6 That was more than **the Pharisees** could take. They **went out**, contacted **the Herodians**, their traditional enemies, and **plotted with** them to **destroy** Jesus. It was still the Sabbath. Herod had brought about the death of John the Baptist. Perhaps his party would be equally successful in killing Jesus. This was the Pharisees’ hope.

M. Great Multitudes Throng the Servant (3:7–12)

3:7–10 Leaving the synagogue, **Jesus withdrew to the Sea** of Galilee. The sea in the Bible often symbolizes the Gentiles. Therefore His action may have depicted His turning from the Jews to the Gentiles. **A great multitude** gathered, not only **from Galilee** but from distant parts as well. The crowd was so great that Jesus asked for **a small boat** so that He could push off from shore to avoid being crushed by those who came for healing.

3:11, 12 When **unclean spirits** in the crowd cried out that He was **the Son of God**, He **sternly warned them** to stop saying this. As already noted, He would not receive the witness of evil spirits. He did not deny that He was the Son of God, but chose to control the time and manner of being revealed as such. Jesus had the power to heal, but His miracles were performed only on those who came for help. So it is with salvation. His power to save is sufficient for all, but efficient only for those who trust Him.

We learn from the Savior’s ministry that need does *not* constitute a call. There was need everywhere. Jesus depended on instructions from God the Father as to where and when to serve. So must we.

III. THE SERVANT’S CALL AND TRAINING OF HIS DISCIPLES (3:13–8:38)

A. Twelve Disciples Chosen (3:13–19)

3:13–18 Faced with the task of world evangelization, Jesus appointed **twelve** disciples. There was nothing wonderful about the men themselves; it was their connection with Jesus that made them great.

They were young men.

There was a threefold purpose behind the call of the twelve: (1) **that they might be with Him**; (2) **that He might send them out to preach**; and (3) that they **might have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons**.

First there was to be a time of training—preparation in private before preaching in public. Here is a basic principle of service. We must spend time **with Him** before we move out as God's representatives.

Secondly, they were sent out **to preach**. Proclamation of the Word of God, their basic method of evangelism, must always be central. Nothing must be allowed to subordinate it.

Finally, they were given supernatural **power**. Casting out **demons** would attest to men that God was speaking through the apostles. The Bible had not yet been completed. Miracles were the credentials of God's messengers. Today men have access to the complete Word of God; they are responsible to believe it *without* the proof of miracles.

3:19 The name of **Judas Iscariot** stands out among the apostles. There is mystery connected with one chosen as an apostle turning out to be the betrayer of our Lord. One of the greatest heartaches in Christian service is to see one who was bright, earnest, and apparently devoted, later turning his back on the Savior and going back to the world which crucified Him.

Eleven proved true to the Lord, and through them He turned the world upside down. They reproduced themselves in ever-widening circles of outreach, and in one sense, we today are the continuing fruit of their service. There is no way of telling how far-reaching our influence for Christ may be.¹
