

1. **Introduction:** Mark continues to describe events in the earthly life of Jesus in his style of “immediate” and “vivid” language. He wants his readers to understand Jesus Christ, the God-Man, who revealed what God is like and what He requires of us.
 - Having healed the paralytic and called Levi to follow Him, Jesus later went to a dinner Levi gave for friends who like him were tax collectors and considered sinners.
 - The religious scribes of the Pharisees were shocked that Jesus would eat with tax collectors and sinners.
 - Jesus confronted them with the defining statement *“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”*
 - Jesus Christ’s earthly mission was to heal spiritual sickness by doing everything necessary to make salvation through grace by faith possible.
 - As time passed, the issue of fasting came up because the disciples of John and the Pharisees practiced regular fasting, but Jesus’ disciples did not.
 - The Old Testament required only one day of fasting which occurred on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:29-17:16).
 - Jews, like people today, often voluntarily fasted. Fasting is a good spiritual discipline whose purpose is not to earn merit or prove that you are serious about God.
 - Its purpose is to align our mind with the mind of God and submit our will to His.
 - Traditional Pharisees fasted on Mondays and Thursdays (Luke 18:12) and took great pride in demonstrating their piety as they fasted (Matthew 6:16-18).
 - Jesus’ critics had complained about His eating with the wrong kind of people. Now they complained that Jesus and His disciples ate on fasting days.
 - Who were these Pharisees? Many believe the Pharisees began in Babylon during the captivity. They adhered to the Law of Moses to preserve their identity as the Israel of God. In Jesus’ time, some 600 years later, the Pharisees had become both a political and religious party.
 - They were careful expositors of Scripture and devoted great effort to apply the principles of the Law to everyday life.
 - One example of their thoroughness was observing the Sabbath. The Law states that every Israelite was to set aside the seventh day of the week for resting the body and refreshing the soul (Exodus 20:10-11).
 - So that details of applying the Law to observing the Sabbath rest and refreshing of the soul would be clear to everyone, Pharisee rabbis devised a list of things prohibited on that day.
 - The oral tradition on the Pharisees was eventually preserved in the writings of the Mishnah. It contains at least 24 chapters on how to keep the Sabbath.

2. **Mark 2:18-20**: *“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?”¹⁹ 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.²⁰ The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day.”*
 - Jesus’ response to the question on not fasting is based on events at a Hebrew wedding.
 - That is an example familiar to all of them. Jews in Israel gathered in the groom’s house to celebrate and feast for as long as a week.
 - Jesus’ answer seems simply to mean that times of legitimate joy call for a relaxed approach to religious rigor. Pharisees themselves looked forward to a good time at weddings.
 - Fasting, rather than feasting, while the wedding celebration is in progress would be in bad taste. But when the wedding is over, fasting would be not only OK but perhaps needed.
 - After that response to the Pharisees primary question, Jesus gives two examples to declare that a new day is dawning, a new era coming, in which many things will be different.

3. **Mark 2:21-22**: *“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.²² 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.”*
 - Both analogies illustrate the same point. The legalism of Pharisaism is not compatible with God’s way of salvation by grace through faith.
 - The OT relationship of the people of Israel to God through the Law provided established order and set them apart as His covenant people. However, as Paul explains in Galatians 3:19, the Law’s greater purpose was serving as a tool to demonstrate our need for salvation.

4. **Galatians 3:19**: *“The purpose of the law was to keep a sinful people in the way of salvation until Christ (the descendant) came, inheriting the promises and distributing them to us.” (The Message, Eugene Peterson)*
 - Again, legalistic use of the Law as the basis for relationship with God is not compatible with the new patch/new wine of the gospel of grace. Human effort cannot do the necessary job.
 - The Son came as Jesus of Nazareth to accomplish that which is necessary to enable sinful people to become holy and righteous like God. It was extremely costly to Jesus.

- God is merciful but also just. He will forgive sin, but the penalty due under the Law must be paid.
 - Jesus perfectly obeyed the Law as our representative. He died to pay the penalty due our sins. He earned salvation for us.
 - As often happens, Mark shifts the scene to another day but continues the same theme which remains dealing with legalism.
5. **Mark 2:23-24**: *“One Sabbath he was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. ²⁴And the Pharisees were saying to him, “Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?”*
- Legalists often divert attention from their moral failures by making a big deal about things they do well. For the Pharisees Sabbath keeping had become a dominant theme, something close to a religious fetish with them.
 - To the simple command to “rest” (both physical and a refreshing of the soul), the Pharisees added a long list of don’ts. They had 39 categories of things that constituted forbidden Sabbath work.
 - Our text refers to a particular Sabbath when Jesus and His disciples gleaned grain as they walked through a field.
 - Plucking wheat from its stem is reaping. Rubbing the wheat heads in your hands is threshing. Blowing away chaff is winnowing. All of which are forbidden Sabbath work activities.
 - So, the Pharisees complained about them breaking the Law.
6. **Mark 2:25-28**: *“And he said to them, “Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: ²⁶how he entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?” ²⁷And he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. ²⁸So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.”*
- God established the Sabbath as a day to reflect on Him and His Word, to refresh the soul, and to physically rest in His provision and protection.
 - God gave the Law to His people to bless them. Each of God’s Laws either promotes quality in a person’s life or restored their relationship to God after a sin.
 - Mankind was created first and then the Sabbath. Thus, the Sabbath was created for man, not man for the Sabbath.
 - Who is in charge of (or Lord of) the Sabbath? Jesus declares that He, the Son of Man, is the Lord of the Sabbath.

- In essence He said to the Pharisees, the Sabbath is not yours to regulate. It is God's gift to His people. Jesus was asserting that He was taking back the Sabbath from human regulation and restoring its life affirming properties given by God.

7. **What is Next:** Begin Mark Chapter 3.