



Mark This Year

**Daily devotional journey
through the Gospel of Mark**

Mark – Chapter 2

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Introduction

What started as a small project has taken off. After talking with lots and lots of people, we will be publishing Mark This Year for each chapter in the gospel of Mark. This will hopefully make it easier to go through.

The idea behind Mark This Year is to give you a daily opportunity to meet Jesus for yourself. No one needs to get in the middle – least of all, me. You should be able to see him for yourself, for who he is.

And, after you Mark This Year, you'll know him for who he claims to be.

I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

John 14:6

Enjoy the journey of a lifetime.

Mark 2

One of Those Days

When He had come back to Capernaum several days afterward, it was heard that He was at home. And many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room, not even near the door; and He was speaking the word to them.

Mark 2:1-2¹

You've been away from home for a while. Maybe on vacation. Maybe on a business trip. Maybe on a cruise. Maybe visiting family and friends. No matter where you've been, it wasn't home.

They didn't put things where you put them. They didn't do things the way you do them. They didn't set the table like you do. They didn't season the food like you do. The bed was different. The sheets were different. The pillows and pillowcases were different. The towels were different.

They didn't read the same things you read. They didn't watch the same shows you watched. They didn't like the same governmental officials you like and trust. They didn't agree with you about a lot of things.

I don't know about you, but when I get back home, I just want to sit down. Sit down, veg out, and relax.

Jesus was away from the familiar for several days. And when he came back, he didn't have a chance to sit down, veg out, or settle back into his routine. His reputation, his words, his miracles had become well known to the point that a whole lot of people came together.

The gathering was phenomenal. Not only was the house filled, but any available space around the door was also crowded. There was no room for anyone else. There were so many people that they spilled out into the street.

Not only was the house crowded with people, but it was also overflowing with sound. The sounds of people talking about Jesus and what they would do when and if they got the chance to meet him personally.

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With the house completely filled, Jesus didn't have a chance to do what we would consider as normal. So, what did Jesus do? But before we look at what he did, let's first look at what he didn't do. He didn't:

- Make announcements
- Organize the people into groups
- Ask for money
- Tell people to like his social media posts
- Talk about political topics
- Point to where the next event was going to be

What's the most important thing that Jesus could do to help them? How could he best assist them in this helpless and hopeless world?

He spoke "the word" to them. He spoke in a way so they understood what he was talking about. He spoke about who God is, how he made them to experience him and life to the fullest. He spoke in a conversational way that was understood down to their bones. He didn't just speak, but he continued speaking for a while.

And while Jesus did the talking, all they had to do was listen. Jesus did all the giving, and they did all the receiving. While Jesus' job was to speak, their job was to listen.

But real listening, true and authentic listening, does more than just translate vibrations that come through the ear and wind up in our heads. Real listening, true and authentic listening always, always, always changes us. It changed their the crowds decision-making, aligning themselves to what he said. Jesus spoke with the result that they were ready to obey.

They were to obey not to win some prize, or even to be blessed. They were to listen and change their life and thinking in order to make it match who God was and how he made us.

In the world of priorities, talking and communicating truth always, always, always comes first. You can't move to change or action until the truth is revealed, communicated, and taken inside.

Yes, Jesus was trying to persuade them, to change their hearts and minds. But not at the expense of the truth. The truth of who God is, and what he expects from us, demands from us.

The LORD God has told us what is right and what he demands: "See that justice is done, let mercy be your first concern, and humbly obey your God."

Micah 6:8 CEV

Yes, as God, our creator and savior, he has the right to not only tell us what is right, but to demand it from us. He can do this because he has paid the price for our selfishness, separation, sin.

Jesus expected this from the people in that crowded house. And he has the right to expect it from us.

Make a Hole

Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on.

Mark 2:3-4

Sometimes there is a great need, something great needs to be done. And sometimes great people rise to the occasion. These well-known people use their influence, power, and money to get something done. And we thank God for them.

But most of time here on planet Earth, great needs are filled by the great unknowns. These unknown, nameless people seem to step in at just the right moment, giving themselves over to something bigger than themselves.

I once had a horrific accident on the side of a snow-covered mountain. Once my head stopped spinning, I started to move around, figuring out what still worked. When tried to lift my right leg, my foot just sort of laid there on the snow. I looked down and my ankle doing an incredible impression of a left 90-degree angle.

I'll never forget what happened next. I had my own, personal version of "some men." A number of guys walked over and carefully carried me off that mountain. I didn't know any of them, but they came to my rescue.

That's who we see here. Some people. Unknown, unnamed people. We don't know who they were or where they came from. Were they friends? Strangers? Servants? Could they be some people they ran into along the side of the road? The only thing we do know is that there were more than one of them. We assume that there were four, but that's it.

And what did they do? Well, they didn't hold a meeting, schedule a Zoom call, send out an email, look for help on YouTube or DIY, take a selfie or film a video. No, they just picked up this paralyzed guy, who couldn't help them in the least, and they carried him. The guy was dead weight, but that didn't stop them from carrying him.

When they came to a problem, the crowded house, they didn't let that stop them. They weren't going to be stopped by something so insignificant like a crowd. They got creative and carried the paralyzed guy onto the roof.

And once on the roof, they made an opening. They weren't going to be stopped by something so insignificant as a roof. When it says that they dug through the roof, this included digging up dirt and grass, then removing tiles that were part of the roof². With the dirt, grass, and tiles out of the way, a hole was made. And once made, they lowered the paralyzed guy down in front of Jesus.

And once they made a hole, they weren't done. They finished their part by lowering the paralyzed man down. But they didn't lower him down just anywhere: they lowered him down right in front of Jesus. Now their job was done.

What do you do when something comes in between you and helping someone? Do you let a "crowded house" stop you? When it gets crowded or difficult, does it discourage you? Or deter you? Or do you stay with it, looking for another way through?

And once that first problem is solved, what do you do when another one come up? Do you let a "roof" stop you? When your way is blocked, when something is in your way, does it stall you? Or stop you? Or do you think outside the box for a creative solution.

If going onto a roof and digging a hole through it to let down a paralyzed guy isn't thinking outside the box, I don't know what is. But they did more than just think, they took their thinking all the way to action.

In "[The Hunt for Red October](#)" the submarines captain runs to meet Jack Ryan after his dangerous and improbably entrance onto the USN Dallas. The ship's captain yells, "Make a hole³," before flying down the steps to meet Jack. That's what these guys did, they made a hole, allowing this poor, paralyzed man to meet Jesus.

Are we willing to carry someone who's nothing but dead weight? And when we come to that first obstacle, or even the second, are we going to abandon them? Are we going to tell ourselves, "Nice try, but he got too heavy, it got too hard, it took too long?" Or, are we going to be like Jesus.

He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross.

Colossians 2:14 NLT

² Luke 5:19

³ <https://youtu.be/1PiN2OrKPfU?t=440>

If he was willing to faithfully take our sin completely away, can't we faithfully stay with the people God has brought into our lives?

Real Forgiveness – Drop the Pot

When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”

Mark 2:5

A group of unnamed men picked up this paralyzed guy on a mat and brought him to Jesus. When they couldn't get in the house where Jesus was, they took him up on the roof, dug a hole in it, and lowered him down in front of Jesus.

All of this took time, energy, ingenuity, dedication. And all this is true, and more. But Jesus doesn't focus in on any of these fine qualities. He doesn't congratulate them on what they did.

And then there's the paralyzed guy himself. He really didn't do anything. He couldn't. All he could do was lay there. He was not able to help himself or the guys who brought him to Jesus.

And instead of commenting on the individual tasks performed, Instead of congratulating them on their selfless act. Instead of commenting on the paralyzed guys patience as they hauled him around, what does Jesus do?

Actually, it's more about what he observed and said and not what he did. He looks into them and sees something more important, more vital than accomplishing anything.

He saw their faith. There was the faith of the men who carried the sick man, dug up the roof and let him down. The faith Jesus sees resulted in their strenuous actions. And then there's the faith of the paralyzed man who did not fight being carried or lowered. He didn't complain about being tossed as they carried him to the house, or carried up to the roof, or being let down in front of Jesus.

I had my own, personal, version of this. I was in an upstairs bedroom when a sudden “attack” of pain struck me. After the EMT's confirmed that I was not having a heart attack, they put a neck brace on me and called the fire department. They needed lots of help lifting me over a railing, lowering me down so they could carry me down the stairs into a waiting ambulance. I was totally helpless. All I could do was lay there while they did all the work.

This miracle of forgiveness is unique within all the stories about Jesus. It's the only forgiveness story where people don't speak to Jesus. All the other

miracles have a conversation where they talk about their need and then Jesus acts. But in this one instance Jesus “sees” their faith, and that’s good enough for him. And he responds by answering the paralyzed guy’s deepest need – forgiveness.

We think of forgiveness as changing our feelings from hatred and hostility to one of friendliness and fondness. But our forgiveness cannot do anything about what was said or done. It’s done and cannot be undone or removed. Let’s call it Feeling Forgiveness.

But the kind of forgiveness Jesus gives is something all together different, more important, more substantial, stronger, deeper. Jesus’ kind of forgiveness is more throwing it away, letting it go, acting as if it never happened. It’s like when a debt is forgiven, you act as if it never happened.

Think of Jesus’ kind of forgiveness as putting everything into a clay pot. All the wrongdoing, all the debt, all the words, thoughts, actions, and attitudes and dropping them. And when you drop that clay pot, it shatters along with everything in it. And once dropped and shattered, there is no way to put it back together. It’s gone for good, thrown away, like it never existed. Let call this Final Forgiveness.

I think you’ll agree that Final Forgiveness is greater, stronger, better than Feeling Forgiveness. Final Forgiveness makes it like it never happened. It cannot be remembered or brought up anymore.

That’s the kind of forgiveness that Jesus gave to that paralyzed guy. And that’s the kind of forgiveness that Jesus gives to you and me. Once Final Forgiveness is given, God no longer remembers it, he acts like our past, our sins, our selfishness are gone once and for all.

God removes all the debt from our sin and guilt. He replaces it with a positive righteousness, Jesus Christ himself. With Jesus as our Final Forgiveness, we stand forgiven, made right and clean forever.

We need to radically change our view of forgiveness from Feeling Forgiveness to Final Forgiveness. Feeling Forgiveness can come and go, depending on our feelings, and they change all the time. Final Forgiveness is what Jesus gave to the paralytic. Final Forgiveness is the only kind of forgiveness that Jesus offers.

And that’s the kind of forgiveness Jesus offers to you and me. If you haven’t received Final Forgiveness, I beg you to receive it. If you have received Final

Forgiveness, I beg you to take it seriously and respond to his dropping your debt, moving it as far as the east is from the west⁴.

I guarantee that living under the reality of Final Forgiveness will free you for the rest of your life.

⁴ Psalm 103:12

Right Question, Wrong Conclusion

Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, "Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'?"

Mark 2:6-9

Important people get important people seats. Some teachers of the law were sitting right there in the front, in the prime seats. They probably didn't get there early in order to sit up front. They probably use their positions of power and privilege to push others aside in order to get the best seats. They wanted to see Jesus up close and personal so they could pick over him with a fine-tooth comb, dissecting his teaching, his words, his mannerisms, even his friends.

When they were thinking to themselves, when they reasoned in their heads, they were already coming to a conclusion. We cannot help but think that their conclusion was also easily read from tone, their faces, and their body language.

They were not the judges on "Dancing with the Stars" but people who were there in order to discredit Jesus. They were jealous of his popularity with the people.

Their observation was correct, who can forgive sins but God alone? They came to a fork in the road and went down the path that everyone from all their past experience told them. Since God alone can forgive sin, when Jesus says that sins are forgiven, he is absolutely and clearly claiming equality with God.

While sin may be damaging to others, hurting them physically, emotionally, spiritually, any and all sin is ultimately against God.

*For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.
Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge.*

Psalms 51:3,4

When it comes to forgiveness, only the person who has been sinned against, the one who has been offended, can ultimately provide forgiveness. I cannot provide forgiveness to someone who hurt you, and the reverse is also true.

So when Jesus offers forgiveness to this paralyzed guy who just descended through the roof, using the strength of others, the meaning is crystal clear. In some way, the paralysis is a direct result of sin, and Jesus offers free and full forgiveness for that sin.

Jesus knew in his spirit that they were judging him, finding him guilty of claiming equality with God. He knew this by what they said, what he experienced from their words and glaring stares.

So Jesus offers a choice for them to pick between two very simple and direct options. Forgiving sin or healing. To be free from the weight and guilt of sin, or to be free from the weight of your own body, unable to walk. And not just to walk in a short demonstration, but to be get up and start walking, and keep on walking through a permanent cure. And the cure is so strong that this paralyzed man would not only be able to walk but could pick up what he was being carried and carried out on his own.

Both are equally unattainable, impossible for people to achieve.

You may find yourself at the same point. You're on the horns of an impossible dilemma, something that cannot be fixed, something that cannot be moved. You're being carried around by the strength of others because you have lost your way, you have lost your strength, you have lost your life.

Jesus offers an invisible restoration followed by a visible one. He does these in this order because the invisible is the most important, the most durable, the longer lasting of the two.

Jesus definitely wants to heal us internally: right here, right now. The physical healing may take place now, sometime in the future, or perhaps someplace in eternity. The guarantee is for healing, but the method and timing of it is in God's hands.

We must believe that Dr. Jesus not only can heal but that he also has our best in mind. He knows what is best from a timing standpoint, from the method standpoint, and even the degree standpoint. He alone wants the best for us, our choice is to choose to trust his methods and his ways.

When we are told that "God is love" part of its deep meaning is that he wants only the best for us. He is not holding anything back, unless it is for his greater glory, our greater good, and the same for others.

We do not see the end from the beginning. We don't even see the end from the middle, but we will see the end in the end. Our place, as a person whom he created and loves, is to wait. Wait our turn. Wait in our place and watch God work.

The Thrill or The Change?

But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So he said to the man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

Mark 2:10-12

This story is so amazing on so many levels. No one speaks other than Jesus. No one asks for anything; prayer, healing, forgiveness. Yet, all this and more is given. His healing and restoration are so complete that he carries home the mat that he was carried in on.

And why does Jesus do what he's about to do? What's his motivation? Is it to show off? Is it to build his following? To make his name known so that when people Googled Jesus that it would find him? No.

It was so that people would travel on a journey, winding up where they came to the land of knowing. But not just knowing and then forgetting. Or knowing and then moving onto something else. But knowing in such an absolute, beyond a shadow of a doubt, no holds barred, kind of knowing that it influenced the rest of their life. To know so completely that they have arrived at the final destination, the end-of-the-line of knowing.

This is an earth-shattering, life changing kind of knowing. This isn't a rote memorization of spelling words or multiplication tables. It's a rip-your-heart-out, blow-the-top-of-your-head-off kind of knowing.

And what does Jesus want these people, and us, to know? That he has the authority to forgive sin. His authority says that it's allowed, it's lawful, it's permitted. He has the right to forgive sin and doesn't need anyone's permission.

This is different than delegated authority. Delegated authority is passed down from on high, from one person to another. Jesus was not delegated with authority to forgive, but he has it within himself.

When Jesus speaks, it's not a command for his sins to get out. It's something oh so much more. It's a declaration, a truth statement of the man's position before a holy God. There is nothing between the forgiven man and God.

When Jesus says that he's forgiven, he's identifying himself as the one-and-only son of God who is from God the Father. This gives him the right and power to personally forgive sin.

One source puts it this way,

When Jesus announces that his sins are forgiven, it is not a command to his sins to depart, but an authoritative proclamation of the man's pardoned state as a believer⁵.

And not only is the man healed, but the impact on the crowd is stunning. They were amazed to the point of being out of their minds. It's like being outside of their bodies and looking into what just happened. They were so impressed and impacted by what they saw that nothing else mattered. This stuck with them to the extent that it changed the direction, the trajectory of their life.

Everything is now changed.

- The man was carried in on a mat.
- Jesus speaks.
- The man carried out the mat.

When they say, "We've never seen anything like this" they really mean it. But I wonder if it changed their hearts? Yes, they've never seen anything like this before, but it sounds outside and disconnected from their inner self. Yes, it was a great healing miracle, but did it truly impact their life?

Jesus wanted them to "know" in such a way that it transformed their lives. But their words sound faint in comparison. There is no commitment, no transformation, no changed lives. They get the thrill but not the transformation. They get the charge but not the change.

Jesus doesn't want to do a miracle in your life just to astound you, but to alter you, to change the way you not only think about life but to alter the way you live life. What you say, what you do, how you see other people.

That's what Jesus wants for you and me. Real change. Dynamic change. Change that goes down to our toenails. Change that totally rocks our world. Change that makes us look back and see such a difference. Change that is undeniable, unmistakable, unrelenting.

⁵ Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary

Is that the kind of change you need? The kind of change you want?

No One is Beyond Help, Hope

Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him.

Mark 2:13,14

If you're like me, I get frightened to distraction whenever I install new software or apply an update. Do you? I'm so afraid that I'm going to upset something in the balance of the universe. Things were working well, or at least I knew what to expect. But after loading some software, sometimes my calm, orderly technology world spins out of control.

For example, whenever I load or update software, not only do I pray, but I actually read everything before hitting OK, Next, or Update. Do you know why? There are things, options, and defaults that they want to change in my technology universe that will upset the balance of power in my world.

Here are a few examples of the things that the software update wants to do to my laptop or phone.

- **Browser** – they want switch me to "their" preferred browser.
- **Search** – they want me to switch to their search engine (yes, there actually are different ones to choose from.)
- **Protection** – they want to install another antivirus, malware, identity protection solution on top of the one I already pay for and use.

What they are trying to do is to change the way I use my computer and phone. They are trying to change my daily habits, the way I do things. They want to change my "defaults," the way I do things without even thinking.

What are the things that you do, think, expect, or say, almost without thinking? These are what I call your "defaults" of life. What are the things we expect, even demand, to be happy? Fulfilled? Content?

And as Jesus is beside the lake, people come to him. He must have had the most magnetic personality ever. And when they come, Jesus doesn't react by retreating, or making people follow him only on social media. No, Jesus personally interacts with them. He teaches them.

For Jesus, when faced with a crowd, defaults to teaching. Teaching, doing the thing that comes naturally when he's with a crowd. And this time, something happens. Or should I say, someone happens. And that someone is Levi.

As Jesus is walking along, he sees Levi. Now Levi was doing his job, he was a tax collector, the most hated, despised job in the land. He had gone over to the enemy. He was a traitor to his family, his people, his nation, his faith. He was working for Rome. He loved money more than a good name or reputation of his countrymen.

But, did that disqualify Levi? This traitor? Not when it comes to Jesus.

[Jesus calls to Levi](#)⁶, but doesn't exactly ask him to follow. It's more of a command to follow. Yes, Jesus calls to Levi, and Levi has a choice. But Jesus' calling to follow is not a passive calling. When Jesus calls Levi to follow, it's not a come if you feel like it, or come when you feel like it. It's a directive to come. To come and actively follow me now, and into the future.

The call of Jesus to follow doesn't just ask us to take the afternoon off or put in for a leave of absence. No. The call of Jesus to follow him will shake up our lives. It replaces the dull defaults of life. It opens us up to a whole new way of thinking and living.

Jesus' call is to start following along with him, and then to continue as a habit of life to follow along with him. It's a call to participation in His companionship, side by side.

I don't know about you, but I find this idea oh so comforting. You see, Levi was not beyond help. He might have felt hopeless, helpless, and incurable on his own. But with the call to follow Jesus, God says in a very loud voice that he is not hopeless, he is not helpless, and he is not incurable.

God's call to follow Jesus can be thought of as a "side-walk." Which side are you on? Whose side are you on? Are you on the same side with Jesus? Walking in the same direction? At the same speed? In the same pace?

If not, then this is your chance. Your opportunity to change the course, change the direction, change the destination of your life. He's calling. You can hear him. He's calling you to let go of the dead defaults of your life and choose a new life with him.

⁶ <https://youtu.be/7IUL9yq0We8>

You are not beyond help. You are not beyond hope. You and your life matters to Jesus. Why else would he die for you? For me? For misfits like us? And his resurrection is the absolute proof positive that he changes everything.

Sit Down

While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Mark 2:15-17

As I think about the people I know, they basically come into two, very different kinds of groups: the rule followers and the rule breakers. When the rule followers work in their coloring book, they always try and stay inside the lines. Rule breakers don't seem to care about the lines. I wonder if they even see the lines.

Rule followers are happy to live within the lines of life. They find comfort and satisfaction inside the lines. They like to follow driving directions and recipes exactly. And if a road is unexpectedly closed, or they find themselves without an ingredient, their world spins out of control, exploding into a supernova of hot gas and nuclear waste.

Rule breakers are happy to live outside the lines of life. They love the excitement and adventure of exploring new, uncharted territory. While they would never buy a coloring book for themselves, when they are forced to use one, the lines are just a humorous recommendation that's made to be ignored. They see driving directions and recipes as an amusing guideline. It's like that line from the first [Pirates of the Caribbean movie](#); "the code is more what you would call a guideline than actual rules⁷."

When I look at Jesus, I see a marvelous mix of both. He's firmly committed to stay within the lines that God makes but has little concern for lines that people make. When God says to do something, he does it with all of his heart, soul, strength, and mind⁸.

Just noodle about this scene from Jesus' life. First of all, it took place in Levi's house. In that day, in that place, in that culture, when you went into

⁷ https://youtu.be/k9ojK9Q_ARE?t=26

⁸ Luke 10:27

someone's house, you were telling the world that you not only were willing to be seen with them publicly, but you also accepted them. There was nothing about them that might infect you, make you unclean before God or people.

But it was more than just the place, it was also the who.

- **Levi** – a notorious tax collector that had betrayed his people, family, country, religious traditions. He had thrown all this away, and more, to get money and power from Rome.
- **Sinners** – these are your average, run-or-the-mill sinners who were not towing the line for all the religious rules and regulations.
- **Many** – Jesus didn't just sit down with one or two tax collectors and sinners. No, he welcomed many of them. And not just at this dinner, but as his followers

When asked about these people, Jesus says that he came for the people that are sick with sin. He didn't come for the people that have all their stuff together, but for all the people who didn't. He came for all the messy people that lived their lives apart from God.

Jesus goes to these people because of his calling and desire to reach those far away from his Father. He didn't come to earth to have a great time, he came to serve. He didn't come to be worshiped, he came to rescue.

The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Matthew 20:28

Jesus came to serve and give his life. But for who? The exact kind of people that the teachers of the law and Pharisees avoided like the plague. The people that the rich, famous, powerful stay away from.

Which brings up an interesting question: where are you willing to go? Who are you willing to go to? To talk with? Touch? Become involved in their lives?

Remember, Jesus reached out to you and me, not when we had our stuff together, but when you were far away, his enemy. If he was willing to do that for us, then in response to his active and passionate love, we need to reach out to the kinds of people that our culture and society say to stay away from.

If they weren't too dirty or evil for Jesus to stay away from, how can we decide that they are beneath us? If Jesus welcomed them, ate with them, talked with them, became friends with them, how can we do anything else?

Yours Aren't

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?"

Mark 2:18

In our world today, there are precious few things that people can agree on. Democrat, Republican, right, left, liberal, conservative titles do nothing but drive us apart. And these are only talking about politics. It seems like that everyone is looking for different things and ways that we can drive ourselves away from one another.

And then, every so often, there is something that overpowers our divisions and pulls us together. Tragedies have a way of doing that. Remember the days right after 9/11. There wasn't anything that anyone wouldn't do. People ran to the Red Cross and hospitals to give blood. People stopped at traffic lights to generously donate to fire fighters and other first responders. Churches were filled. There was a community and sense of oneness that overwhelmed us. And we weren't only glad for it, we were thankful for it.

But then we became tired of it all. All the media attention and repetition. We wanted justice and revenge, but there wasn't any coming anytime soon. Slowly, but surely, our sense of community and unity dissolved into a sea of different opinions and divisions.

If you think back over our experience with COVID, doesn't it trace over the same steps? We initially came together, we united, we stood together, we helped one another. How many commercials and messages of "We're in this together" did we see? And now, we're definitely not in this all together. No matter what you think or feel, what side you are on, we can all agree that there is no unity in purpose, calling, action.

That's sort of what's happening here with the story of Jesus. Everyone, and I mean everyone is in agreement. They were all fasting at that very time. No matter their views or background, they were fasting. It was scheduled. It was in the news. On social media. All over your news feed. It was in plain sight; everyone knew about it.

And, for once, both the truly spiritual and those doing it just for show were in agreement. Conservative and liberal came together on this bipartisan topic. Something they could agree on, something they could both support and do together.

But Jesus did not insist on following this strong tradition. He did not “go with the flow” or command it of his followers. Jesus has a remarkable flexibility when it comes to traditions.

Jesus does not view himself as defined by what people think, what they expect, what society thought was normal. His view of himself was based on his relationship with God the Father. This came both in personal time with God and public encounters.

Jesus comes out from John’s baptism and is met with these words from God.

"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

Matthew 3:17

Or this pronouncement from heaven as Jesus predicts his own death.

"Father, glorify Your name." Then a voice came out of heaven: "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again."

John 12:28

Jesus takes his identity from his relationship with God. Period. This is solid ground that never moves, never shakes, never changes. It’s not the shifting sands of the latest fad, newest social media platform. No need to try and play catch-up with whatever is new this week. No exchanging someone or something for what is new, bright, and shiny.

Jesus based his life on things that do not change.

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

Matthew 24:35

Everything in this world is temporary. It is here today, gone tomorrow. It is destined to get old, breakdown, and fade away. The more and more that we place the weight of our lives on the things of this world, the more uncertain will be the shifting sands we find under our feet.

There’s an old hymn that put it’s so, so well.

On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand,

All other ground is sinking sand.

So, where are you building your life? Where do you want admiration and encouragement from? Where do you go to figure out who you are, what you're worth?

If you look within, you'll never have the power or resources to stand against the tide. If you look to people, they will always disappoint, always abandon, always fail.

But Jesus never fails.

Beyond What We See

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."

Mark 2:19,20

I like weddings – for the most part. Weddings are happy, even joyful events when we get together to celebrate a good thing. Friends, acquaintances, and family members have been invited ahead of time to the great and glorious event of a wedding.

With all the weddings I've attended or performed, I've never seen anyone at a wedding dressed like they are going to a funeral. They are always dressed to celebrate. In their celebrating, they choose what they wear. I've seen people in tuxedo's, bib overalls, and everything in between, and it's always been to celebrate.

When asked about fasting, Jesus chooses to highlight what's not seen over what's seen. What's beneath the surface over what's on top. Jesus is all about God's reality over ritual, ceremony, and what's considered normal from a human and physical perspective. Over and over, Jesus talks and acts like there is something more, something greater than what we see and touch.

Jesus lived by faith, which means he viewed life from God's viewpoint: an eternal, unseen perspective. The ultimate reality of what we don't see with our eyes overruled the reality of what we could see.

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.

Hebrews 11:1

Jesus spoke, acted, and lived based on what he knew to be true, even though he could not see it with his physical eyes. This is the life of faith. This is the life that pleases God. This is the life where we can fulfill our purpose.

I don't know about you, but I've made so many decisions and choices based on what I saw, what I could touch, what I thought was true. The number of and depth of problems I caused, the pain I inflicted in my own life, the life of

those I love, and even perfect strangers, are too many to tell. The list is just too long

Living life only on what we can see is another way of trying to live life based on what we can control. Or, should I say, what we think we can control. We think that if we have enough information that we can figure

We are frightfully busy running around, looking for the right lever to pull, the right button to push, the right hurdle to jump over, the right wall to knock down in order to have a full, successful life. But I've come to realize that this is nothing more than my personal "religion." A faith where I worship at the altar to myself; my information, my skills, my intellect, my abilities.

No matter how we try to live our lives based on ourselves, deep down in our hearts we've invented our own religion. We've been at the same temple, offering the same sacrifices, at the same altar of self-sufficiency, self-importance.

There was a time in my life when I had done everything "right". I had followed all of the "religious rules", I had performed all of the correct traditions, said the right words, in the right place, guided by the right person. And yet, walking away from that I thought, "that didn't solve anything. That didn't fix me or the guilt in my soul."

No matter what your religious upbringing, what traditions, sacrifices, or things you do, we cannot fix ourselves nor pay for the brokenness in our lives or the pain we've caused. There really is nothing we can do, that's why God had to intervene. Not only paying for who we are and what we have done, but empowering us to change.

No amount of having the right exterior clothing, performing rituals, or even fasting can change us from within. [There's an old hymn](#) puts it so well.

What can wash away my sin?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus;
What can make me whole again?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus⁹.

This is the "unique genius" of Christianity! Every other religion, view of life, or philosophy puts the burden solely on us. We have to fix ourselves; we have to come up with the energy to repair our brokenness. And we always, always, always fall short because within ourselves, we can't change.

⁹ <https://youtu.be/C4Sd5BL4j0A?t=10>

This comes alone from God through Jesus. Yes, it sounds exclusive because it is. Every other approach depends on us. This depends on God, and God alone.

Isn't it time to change teams? Time to change your approach to life and how you manage it? Isn't it time to give Jesus a chance?

No One

"No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. Otherwise, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins."

Mark 2:21,22

There are just some things that no one does. It's just so obvious that no one in their right mind would do it.

But then, there's me.

- When I was about 8, I jumped out of a transit bus and, without looking, ran in front of it. The impact from the passing car not only tore up my leg but made some blood vessels in my eye explode, leaving behind a cool looking red spot in the middle of my pupil.
- When I was about ten, I climbed out of my bedroom window to get a toy that had got caught in the gutter. After getting the toy and tossing it down, I jumped instead of going back through the open window because it "seemed easier to do."
- When I was in my forties, I was riding an ATV in the remote deserts of the Four Corners¹⁰ area. As I was going up the side of a mountain, the ground gave way and I fell. And I fell. And I fell. And fortunately for owner, the ATV landed on top of me.

While these are only a few of the many "what was I thinking" moments in my life, Jesus says that there are a couple of things that no one would choose to do. He's saying that forcing behavior is the old garment, the old wineskin, the old way of doing things. Another way to think about it is that trying to force people to act, speak, feel, think, and live from outside force, guilt, shame, scolding is the old garment, the old wineskins.

And yet, this is exactly how it's packaged and sold to us. Everyone, and I mean everyone, is pedaling this to create a new world, a new life, new relationships, new finances. It goes like this: if we reward the good and punish the bad, everyone will obviously beat a path to the good. How much simpler could it be?

¹⁰ Where Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and Utah meet.

But there's one problem with this, and it's a huge one. We can't agree on what is good. What one group claims is good, another claims it's beyond bad. What one side says loudly is right, the other side screams about it being wrong.

But Jesus offers something oh so different. He offers us life based on a love commitment that gives and wants nothing but the best for us. And his best is measured from God's perspective, not ours. His love commits him to offer himself, a life guided by him, and an eternity with him.

He is less impressed with accomplishments than he is of a changed heart. A changed heart is not interested in the applause of people, eyeballs on your website, or likes by social media. A changed heart energizes us from the inside, where he lives and empowers us. It leads to loving and serving God and people. It never leads to self-promotion, putting yourself first in front of anyone.

When Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is within you¹¹" he showed that it's not a forced, external show that he is most interested in. He's looking for a broken and energized heart that overflows with a loving desire to use my words, thoughts, actions, and attitudes to please the God who loves us, saves us, wants to be with us forever.

And that naturally leads to sharing our life with others, helping them, serving them, loving them. This is the most attractive live imaginable. People are on the lookout for selfless people that are only interested in helping, and not expanding their clique.

Living with a new patch, or a new wineskin, does not guarantee an easy life. This new patch/wineskin kind of life might actually get you into trouble inside this life or with certain people. A new patch/wineskin kind of life does not guarantee that you will get the reward or blessing in this life either. That would just be more selfishness and self-centeredness.

For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.

2 Chronicles 16:9

Are you the kind of person that God is looking for? Is your heart the kind of heart that is fully committed to him? Is your heart the kind of heart that God wants to strengthen?

¹¹ Luke 17:21

If yes, then there is no doubt that he is looking for you. He will find you, and strengthen you.

It's well worth being that kind of person. Today. Tomorrow. For all eternity.

Sonny and Cher Were Right

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

Mark 2:23,24

Yes, **The Beat Goes On**¹². The beat goes on, and on, and on. doesn't just go on, it gets louder and stronger. The spiritual leaders, those in power, people with a solid and powerful place within the Hebrew "hierarchy" continue to ratchet up their observations and reactions. Here are a few examples.

- Forgiving and healing paralytic – Mark 2:6,7

Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

Their first reaction has them sort of talking to the air. They were thinking to themselves.

- Dinner at Matthew's house – Mark 2:16

When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

Their second reaction was not to Jesus directly asked his disciples. Again, they didn't speak directly to Jesus but to his followers.

Now, when they are walking through grainfield, they finally screw up their courage and talk directly to Jesus. The Pharisees didn't just say "look" but kept saying over and over again, "Look. Look. Look."

Think about this for a minute. In order for the Pharisees to have time to keep on saying look, look, look, something had to happen. Or should I say that something didn't happen. For this to happen, it means that Jesus didn't immediately respond to their first "look." This went on for a while. They were walking through fields of grain for a while, and the disciples were picking and

¹² <https://youtu.be/bS3O5zg290k>

eating the grain for a while. And as they were walking and eating, the Pharisees kept on saying, "look." After a while they said it again. And again. And again.

Their words, their accusations, are not directly against Jesus but against his followers. Jesus is not harvesting and eating the grain, but the disciples are. This is not a personal accusation about Jesus' action, but about his leadership and teaching. It's about his lack of action, his lack of guidance, his lack of control, his lack of discipline over his followers.

Jesus wisely did not immediately respond. He didn't react after the first "look." He didn't smack them upside of the head with a frying pan even after the second "look." He didn't pick up his cell phone and post something on social media right after the first couple of "looks." He said nothing, he waited.

We would be wise to follow Jesus' pattern when people say things to accuse us, to threaten us. There is no need to respond to each and every comment. Life is not a tennis match where you have to chase down and swing at each and every ball hit on our side of the court. Like a good and wise quarterback, there are times to just take a sack.

One clever leader explained it this way. They didn't have enough time, energy, or patience to try and answer each and every attack. They chooses not to correct each misquote or accusation. They were going to stay focused on their main task. They weren't going to let the enemy win by chasing after all this other stuff. Or, to quote Stephen Covey;

The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.

How's your focus today? Are you concentrating on the main thing, the important thing? Or are you distracted like so many flies swarming around some decaying, rotting, discarded piece of food?

You may not have a top position in your community. You may not be some great leader with an immense social media following. You might not even be able to speak or write all that well. But that doesn't mean that you are not important to God. It doesn't mean that he can't use you significantly. If it did, then God made a mistake when he made you, and he's too weak to empower you.

Now is the day, now is the time to step up and let God speak to you, to speak through you, to act through you. It doesn't take great strength, a

brilliant mind, gifted speaking abilities. All it takes is a humble heart and a willingness to do what God says.

Now, that's not all that difficult. Is it?

Sonny and Cher Are Wrong

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

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."

Mark 2:25-27

How do you handle conflict? Do you immediately blow up? Does a thermonuclear mushroom cloud rise from your head whenever anyone says anything? Does it take you a while to screw up your courage before you open your mouth at all? Do you start planning your painful and vicious counterattack from the first word? Or do you just take it, allowing the verbal body blows to pummel you?

Jesus kept quiet for a while. But then when he comes out, he brings it.

He didn't debate them or the idea directly but tries to answer their argument, like putting it down for a nap. He uses a well-known story that they would all be very familiar with. This example from the life of King David shows flexibility and creativity in certain parts of God's plan, at certain times. And how can you argue with King David?

God gives us this story about King David to show us who he is so that we can align ourselves with him. Contrary to popular opinion, both today and back then with the Pharisees, God is not looking down from heaven with a big stick in his hand, just waiting for the opportunity to pounce on us over the smallest slip.

The idea of the Sabbath is that it is a means to an end, the good of all people. The Pharisees, along with all the rest of the religious know-it-alls, only want to see lots and lots of little rules. Little rules that they can jump all over people with, showing off their power instead of demonstrating God's mercy.

I know that the idea of the Sabbath has been under attack for some time. After all, with technology and flexibility, we can work from home at any time, on any day. And this is good – to a point. Working all the time, day in, day out, has brought us to the brink of disaster.

There has never been more a more exhausted, depressed, stressed generation. And in response, we are self-medicating ourselves at an all time high with drugs, alcohol, porn, gambling. People are leaving their jobs in record numbers in search of a better life, not just better pay.

The idea behind the Sabbath is that God made us, and he knows how much we can handle. He knows that we are not machines but need rest and renewal every so often. Isn't that what people are looking for? Shouting for? Crying out for?

The Sabbath is not about taking anything away from us, but it's totally about giving something to us. It's not trying to take away our independence, our self-determination, taking control away from us and giving it to someone else. The Sabbath is all about renewing us, giving us rest, putting strength back into us.

Jesus ends his answer, not on the defensive, but with an offensive bombshell. His answer goes something like this.

- Question: Who came up with the idea and made the Sabbath?
Answer: God.
- Question: Who can overrule the Sabbath?
Answer: God.
- Question: When Jesus says that he's Lord of the Sabbath, who is he claiming to be?
Answer: God.

Jesus makes it clear that he "is" Lord, not only of the Sabbath, but all of life. He doesn't hope to become Lord sometime in the future, or after some additional education, degrees and experience. He doesn't have to wait for someone to die to become Lord like earthly kings or queens, or after winning an election to be installed as Lord.

He says that he is Lord right now. The creator, the sustainer, the owner of everyone and everything. And as the owner, he has the right to do whatever he wants with his possessions.

And when it comes to you and me, Jesus desperately wants us to turn towards him and take a step in his direction. His focus is not to rap you on the knuckles, but to wrap you up in his arms.

When he says that he loves you, it means that he wants nothing but the absolute best for you. His actions and intent is only for our good. He is patient, kind, compassionate, loving.

How could we turn away from a God like that?