

# Christian Rhythms of Life

Devotional Reading: Ecclesiastes 2:20–25

Background Scripture: Jeremiah 31:12–13; Mark 2:18–28; 6:30–32;  
John 2:1–11

Today's Scripture: Mark 2:18–28

## I. Question of Fasting

### Mark 2:18–22

**18 And the disciples of John and of the Pharisees used to fast: and they come and say unto him, Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but thy disciples fast not?**

**19 And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? as long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast.**

**20 But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days.**

**21 No man also seweth a piece of new cloth on an old garment: else the new piece that filled it up taketh away from the old, and the rent is made worse.**

**22 And no man putteth new wine into old bottles: else the new wine doth burst the bottles, and the wine is spilled, and the bottles will be marred: but new wine must be put into new bottles.**

18. Our passage lands within a series of accounts depicting conflicts between Jesus' actions and Jewish religious tradition. These narratives point to a shift in faith and practice with the arrival of God's kingdom.

People inevitably compared Jesus and

*John* the Baptist. They were contemporaries, and each established himself as a prominent Jewish rabbi with devoted *disciples*. Their ministries, which shared a common goal of calling Israel back to faithfulness, overlapped in time and message. Therefore, it is unsurprising that questions over observable differences between their habits arose. The Pharisees' religious practices were well-known, and apparent differences from those of Jesus prompted the question we see here.

The Pharisees consistently meet Jesus' messages with pushback and interrogation. First, they take issue with Jesus declaring forgiveness of sins, then His choice to dine with publicans and sinners (Mark 2:1–17). Now, the tension builds further as the controversy moves to fasting practices.

19. Jesus responds with a parable framed as a question. First-century Jews observed the wedding as an extended feast that could last for days. The groom's family hosted the wedding at their home. Guests gathered ahead of the bride. They waited at the groom's house while the bridegroom went to receive the bride. The groom then escorted the bride from her home to his home, where the assembled guests shared in a communal celebration. Thus, the groom's arrival signaled the start of the wedding feast, a time of unity and joy.

Jesus' narrative implies that there is a time and place for fasting, but this is neither!

Jesus' use of the bridal metaphor elicits recollection of prophetic Scriptures. Jeremiah spoke of Judah's exile as an end to the joyous sound of a bride and groom's voices (Jeremiah 7:34; 16:9; 25:10). He then promised restoration of the nation and joy in glorious praise (33:11). Isaiah compared God to a groom who rejoices over His bride, Israel (Isaiah 62:5). Considering these familiar images, Jesus continues preaching that the kingdom of God is at hand (Mark 1:15).

20. Jesus takes the imagery into unexpected territory. No one anticipates a groom to be taken away from the wedding party. Although no custom corresponds to this description, 1 Maccabees 9:37–41 (a non-biblical text) records a violent episode of it happening. Naturally, feasting ceases if the groom is taken from the celebration. Joy turns to mourning, which appropriately expresses itself in fasting.

Jesus' veiled warning probably baffles hearers. But it also prepares them for future events. His cryptic speech foreshadows his crucifixion (Mark 8:31).

21. The conversation continues without a break, but Jesus moves to a second parable, utilizing new imagery. His example expands the subject from fasting to everything related to the kingdom of God. God's kingdom requires and implements a new paradigm.

If someone patched a torn *old* cloak with new, unshrunk *cloth*, it would tear when drying out after getting wet. In the same way, old religious practices will not hold up to new ways of doing things. Jesus' teaching indicates a necessary separation between the old and new.

22. To drive the point home, Jesus launches directly into a third parable. The term translated *bottles* refers to bags made from leather that store wine while it fer-

ments. When new, such bags are flexible and stretchy. Off-gassing occurs during the fermentation process. As gas builds up, it puts pressure on the bags. New bags expand with the process. Old bags, however, are stiff and brittle. If new wine ferments in them, both wine and bag are ruined.

Jesus is warning all who will listen that the new is incompatible with the old. His ministry inaugurates the new. God's promises are being fulfilled, and new ways of doing things are in play. Jesus clarifies the establishment of a new way, a new covenant, and the arrival of God's kingdom.

## II. Question of Sabbath

### Mark 2:23–28

**23 And it came to pass, that he went through the corn fields on the sabbath day; and his disciples began, as they went, to pluck the ears of corn.**

**24 And the Pharisees said unto him, Behold, why do they on the sabbath day that which is not lawful?**

**25 And he said unto them, Have ye never read what David did, when he had need, and was an hungred, he, and they that were with him?**

**26 How he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and did eat the shewbread, which is not lawful to eat but for the priests, and gave also to them which were with him?**

**27 And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath:**

**28 Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath.**

23. This verse signals a scene and subject change. Jesus and His followers are traveling through farmland. *Corn* refers to cereal crops like wheat and barley, not the maize that North Americans associate with the word. This day, the grain is ripe and ready for consumption.

24. Jesus' critics among *the Pharisees* jump on what they see, quickly concluding that the Law of Moses forbids the disciples' actions. In their minds, the disciples were working in three ways: harvesting, threshing, and winnowing. Harvesting refers to the act of picking the grain. Threshing involves separating the grain from the hull. Winnowing is where the hulls blow away, leaving only the grain. Preparation for eating requires all three.

25. Jesus answers His opponents with an analogy from Israel's history (see 1 Samuel 21:1–6). As religious leaders, the Pharisees are familiar with this story. Before ruling, young David served in King Saul's court. But Saul, jealous of David's success and popularity, wanted to kill his young rival. So David fled with several of his supporters. After a tiring journey of several miles, David and his fellow fugitives were famished and exhausted.

26. David went into the tabernacle looking for food. The purpose of the tabernacle (*the house of God*) was worship and sacrifice. Typically, food was present at these sacrifices, and a portion of it was set aside for the priesthood to eat. The priest at Nob informed David there was no "common bread" there. The only available food was "hallowed bread," also known as *shewbread*. Only priests were allowed to eat this bread. On this occasion, however, *the high priest* violated the rule and gave David the bread.

A small problem arises in this text with the name *Abiathar*. According to 1 Samuel 21:1, the name of the man who helped David was Ahimelech. Abiathar was his son, the only priest to escape the violent consequences of helping David. Abiathar joined David's entourage and eventually served in the tabernacle as high priest with Zadok. So when Jesus refers to *the days of Abiathar*, He is pointing to a general time frame. Referring to Abiathar as *the high*

*priest* recognizes the office he eventually took and for which he was best known.

At this point we may ask ourselves, "What is the relationship between the alleged violation of the Sabbath and David's violation?" Each incident involves godly men doing something presumably forbidden to meet a valid need.

27. Jesus responds again with a whole new paradigm. He says the purpose of the law is to bless humankind. Where its usage is misinterpreted and misapplied, the result is undue burden. God desires good for His people, but Jesus' opponents have lost sight of the introduction to the law: "I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Exodus 20:2). God, who gives Israel freedom, does not intend His law to enslave and burden. The Pharisees have a decision to make: which will be their priority—human need or ritual formality?

28. Jesus' declaration is the climax of the exchange. He refers to Himself as *the Son of man*, a self-designation that occurs more than 80 times across all four Gospels. This designation generally means "one who belongs to the category 'man,'" as in a human. The book of Ezekiel uses it dozens of times to delineate between a man used as the mouthpiece of God and God Himself. However, Jesus uses it differently. His use connects Him with power and authority, assuming He is the king of God's kingdom. He is the one who rules and reigns.

With this title, Jesus claims the authority to apply God's law. Jesus is saying, in effect, that He is the one who defines Sabbath adherence, not the Pharisees. In so doing, He strips away the trappings of religiosity and tradition and replaces them with sovereignty. God decides how His law applies, and Jesus says that role belongs to Him. The Sabbath and its practice are subject to Jesus' supreme authority.

# Involvement Learning

## Christian Rhythms of Life

### Into the Lesson

Write down a general schedule of what you do each day. Specific times are unnecessary; the goal is to list at least five typical daily activities between waking up and going to sleep.

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We prioritize certain activities or habits by repeating them often and consistently. These rhythms keep us balanced and healthy. In today's lesson, look for the rhythms and habits Jesus promotes and consider their relevance to our lives.

### Key Text

He said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath.  
—Mark 2:27–28

### Into the Word

How does Jesus' teaching in Mark 2:18–20 compare with God's message to Israel in Isaiah 58:1–12?

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Write down one way Israel misused fasting over time.

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Write down one way God redirected their practice to align with His heart.

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### Into Life

Make a plan to balance fasting, feasting, working, and resting.

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Choose one meal or regular habit to fast (skip) and one meal to use as a celebratory feast this week; then choose one hour to intentionally work on a particular task and one hour to purposefully rest.

*Meal/Habit to Fast:*

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*Celebratory Feast:*

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*Hour to Work on Task:*

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*Hour to Rest:*

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How can you use these special times in ways that honor the Lord and help you draw closer to Him?

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### Thought to Remember

Christ is Lord over the rhythms of our lives.