

Mark 2:18-3:6 ~ Scripture Verses

Jesus Questioned About Fasting

¹⁸ 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?"

¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast.

²¹ "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. ²² 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."

Jesus Is Lord of the Sabbath

²³ 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."

Mark 3

Jesus Heals on the Sabbath

¹ Another time Jesus went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled 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 shriveled 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.

Mark 2:18-3:6 ~ Discussion Questions

1. What dilemma puzzled the people who came to Jesus? (Verse 2:18) Why do you think the disciples of John the Baptist were fasting?
2. What was Jesus' answer to the people? Why do you think Jesus used a wedding feast to illustrate following him?
3. Have you ever fasted? When and for how long? Did you have a deep sense of hunger or was it more a ritual? What role do you think fasting should play in your spiritual life?
4. These are the first of Jesus' parables. They are among the few that are in all three synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). What is the point he is making with a story about an old coat? Why not put a new patch on an old coat? Why not put fresh wine in an old wineskin?
5. The people in Jesus' audience were some disciples of John the Baptist (and perhaps some Pharisees). The parable had a special meaning for them. What was it? Hint: do you think his message was that an old garment should be repaired with a patch that has been preshrunk? Or that vintage wine should be put in old wineskins? Or was the message something else? Is there a message here for us today?
6. In what ways does following Christ require us to replace old habits with new ones? Why do we resist making these changes?
7. In Verse 2:24, what were the disciples doing that upset the Pharisees?
8. What was Jesus' response to the Pharisees? (2:25-26) According to him, why were both David and Jesus' disciples justified in breaking the Sabbath restriction?
9. Explain the meaning of 2:27-28 – Then he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”
10. How were Jesus' views and the Pharisees views of piety different? Is it more important to follow the spirit of the law or the letter of the law? Can following the spirit of the law get you in trouble?
11. In 3:2, it says the Pharisees watched to see if Jesus would heal the man. What's the significance of saying “*would* heal?” Why were the Pharisees watching to see if Jesus would heal the man *on the Sabbath*? What did Jesus ask them? (3:4) Who was actually breaking the Sabbath? How?
12. Are there areas in which churches today follow the “letter of the law” rather than the “spirit of the law?” Explain.
13. Have you ever experienced a time when the requirements of your Christian faith seemed to conflict with a human need? What should we do in these cases?

Mark 2:18-3:6 ~ Leader's Guide

1. What dilemma puzzled the people who came to Jesus? (Verse 2:18) Why do you think the disciples of John the Baptist were fasting?

The people wondered why the disciples of John the Baptist and followers of the Pharisees were fasting and the disciples of Jesus were not. John the Baptist's disciples may have been fasting because he was in prison (1:14) or this may have been a practice among them as an expression of repentance, intending to hasten the redemption announced by John.

The Pharisees had extended the requirement for fasting far beyond the law of Moses which called for fasting only on the Day of Atonement (the 10th day of the 7th month – Leviticus 16:29-31). After the Babylonian exile, four other annual fasts were observed by the Jews (Zech 7:5, 8:19). However, by the time of Jesus, the Pharisees fasted twice a week.

2. What was Jesus' answer to the people? Why do you think Jesus used a wedding feast to illustrate following him?

Jesus compared his disciples with the guests of a groom at a wedding. A Jewish wedding was a particularly joyous occasion and the celebration associated with it often lasted a week. It was unthinkable to fast during such festivities, because fasting was associated with sorrow. Jesus went on to say that when the bridegroom (Jesus himself) was taken from them, that would be the time for fasting.

3. Have you ever fasted? When and for how long? Did you have a deep sense of hunger or was it more a ritual? What role do you think fasting should play in your spiritual life?

4. These are the first of Jesus' parables. They are among the few that are in all three synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). What is the point he is making with a story about an old coat and an old wineskin?

The metaphors were drawn from contemporary culture in the time of Jesus. Wineskins would stretch with new wine being put in as it continues to ferment, and then they would harden. If new wine was put into a hardened wineskin, the continued fermentation risked bursting the skin. Similarly, new cloth would be expected to shrink considerably, so using it to patch already-shrunken cloth would be asking for problems.

5. The people in Jesus' audience were some disciples of John the Baptist (and perhaps some Pharisees). The parable had a special meaning for them. What was it? Hint: do you think his message was that an old garment should be repaired with a patch that has been preshrunk? Or that vintage wine should be put in old wineskins? Or was the message something else? Is there a message here for us today?

6. In what ways does following Christ require us to replace old habits with new ones? Why do we resist making these changes?

None of us likes to give up something familiar or comfortable. This is even more true when this “something” has been the controlling point for our view of reality, morality, and religion. So we have a tendency to plug in something we like in a new experience or religion into our old religious context and make it fit. Jesus’ point here is that what he brings cannot be made to fit in the old order and old forms of religion with which the Jews were familiar. To do that would be destructive to both the old and the new. What Jesus brings is new, fresh, and transformational. It will rip apart anything that tries to force it into another way of doing, perceiving and experiencing. Becoming a Christian is a whole new life, not just another religion to be thrown into the world mix of faiths. This is as true today as it was 2,000 years ago.

Jesus is saying he was the start of a new religion separate from Judaism, and even from that of John the Baptist. You have to be careful of taking this too far, as some Christians have used it to propose new ways of being Christian or even entirely new forms of Christianity.

7. In Verse 2:24, what were the disciples doing that upset the Pharisees?

There was nothing inherently wrong with picking the heads of grain, which fell under the provisions of Deuteronomy 23:25 – If you enter your neighbor’s grainfield, you may pick kernels with your hands, but you must not put a sickle to their standing grain. But according to Jewish tradition, harvesting (which is what Jesus’ disciples technically were doing) was forbidden on the Sabbath by Exodus 34:21 – Six days you shall labor, but on the seventh day you shall rest; even during the plowing season and harvest you must rest.

8. What was Jesus’ response to the Pharisees? (2:25-26) According to him, why were both David and Jesus’ disciples justified in breaking the Sabbath restriction?

On both occasions godly men did something forbidden. Since, however, it is always “lawful” to do good and save life (even on the Sabbath), both David and disciples were within the spirit of the law.

9. Explain the meaning of 2:27-28 – Then he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”

Jewish tradition had so multiplied the requirements and restrictions for keeping the Sabbath that the burden had become intolerable. Jesus cut across these traditions and emphasized the God-given purpose of the Sabbath—a day intended for the benefit of people for spiritual, mental, and physical restoration.

10. How were Jesus' views and the Pharisees views of piety different? Is it more important to follow the spirit of the law or the letter of the law? Can following the spirit of the law get you in trouble?

11. In 3:2, it says the Pharisees watched to see if Jesus would heal the man. What's the significance of saying "*would* heal?" Why were the Pharisees watching to see if Jesus would heal the man *on the Sabbath*? What did Jesus ask them? (3:4)

The significance of saying "*would* heal" indicated that the Pharisees believed in Jesus' power to perform miracles. The question was not "could he?" but "would he?" Jewish tradition prescribed that aid could be given to the sick on the Sabbath only when the person's life was threatened, which obviously was not the case here.

Jesus asks, Which is better, to preserve life by healing or to destroy life by refusing to heal? The question is ironic since while Jesus was ready to heal (and did so), the Pharisees were plotting to kill him. It is obvious who was guilty of breaking the Sabbath.

12. Are there areas in which churches today follow the "letter of the law" rather than the "spirit of the law?" Explain.

13. Have you ever experienced a time when the requirements of your Christian faith seemed to conflict with a human need? What should we do in these cases?