

Mark 2:18-3:6

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[0:00] Thank you, Joe. Thanks, Simon. It's great to be with you all again. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Andy Robertson. I'm doing a church plant in the area of Dundee called! Charleston. It's a really nice area. You should come and visit it. One big prayer point I would have for us is please do pray that we would get some more seasoned Christians just coming and helping with the work that we are doing there. Charleston's a housing scheme, for those of you who don't know, in the northwest of the city. I was really struck this morning. We just have a number of people from broken backgrounds who are hurting, and we just need help in discipling and walking with these people through the many traumas that they have faced. So please do pray that the Lord would raise up some seasoned Christians to come and help with the work in Charleston.

If you do have a Bible, can you turn with me to Mark chapter 2, verse 18? It seems that every time I come to Bon Accord and I'm given a passage, it's a belter and a difficult one, so thanks again for that. Mark chapter 2, verse 18, we're going to read through to chapter 3, verse 6. If you've got one of these blue Bibles, it's on page 837, 837, Mark 2 and verse 18.

Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting, and people came and said to Jesus, why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast? 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. The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and they will fast in that day. 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. 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.

[2:22] On Sabbath, he was going through the cornfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck ears of corn. The Pharisees were saying to him, look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath? 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?

How he entered the house of God in the time of Abiathar, the high priest, and ate the bread of presence, which is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him.

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. Again, he entered the synagogue, and a man was there with a withered hand, and they watched Jesus to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath so that they might accuse him.

And he said to the man with the withered hand, come here. And he said to them, is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill? But they were silent.

He looked round at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, said to the man, stretch out your hand. He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him. Amen. This is God's Word. Let me pray, and we'll look at that passage together. Father, we just want to pray very simply. Please speak to us through your Word. Challenge us, Lord, in the areas of our life where we need to be challenged.

[4:10] Comfort us in the areas where we need to be comforted. And above all, Lord, as this gospel is opened, we pray that we would see Jesus, the good King. In His name we pray. Amen.

Well, the folks back in our church in Charleston have told me that I used too many illustrations from Lord of the Rings, so I've had to scale it back. But tonight I'm not in Charleston, so I want to begin

by talking about Lord of the Rings. If you've ever seen those films, you know that there's a character who's part of a lineage of long-lost kings. His name is Aragorn, and he's the man. He's the heir to the throne of a place called Gondor, and basically everyone in Gondor is waiting for this moment when their king would return. That return would mark the restoration of order and the defeat of evil. And so Aragorn is this key figure in the story, but not everyone is thrilled when he makes an appearance. There's a guy called Boromir, and he was high up in Gondor's society. His dad had been ruling in the king's absence, and the moment he discovers who Aragorn is, he simply says, Gondor has no king. Gondor needs no king. He did not view the arrival of this authority figure as good news because he didn't want someone in charge of him, someone who was ruling over him, someone who could supplant his authority, take him out of his comfort zone of what he'd been used to.

Now, I'm saying that because that is really what is happening here in Mark's gospel. Mark began this gospel. How does he begin? He begins by telling us that this is good news. This is the beginning of the gospel, which means good news of Jesus, the Christ, the King, the Son of God. This is the best possible news. The King has come to save and restore this broken world. But not everyone thinks that the arrival of Jesus is good news. In fact, we have this group who were the religious leaders of Israel at this time called the Pharisees, Sadducees, and they absolutely despised Jesus. Last week, they were grumbling about him. You would have seen that in Mark chapter 2. Today, that grumbling is about to take a brutal turn. And friends, we're only in chapter 3 of Mark's gospel. And right at the beginning now, we are thinking about the death of Jesus. Do you see how our passage ended in chapter 3, verse 6? The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against Jesus on how to destroy him. By the way, this group, the Herodians, they were a group that was like totally the opposite of what the Pharisees were like. These two groups would normally have despised each other, but they have united together in their desire to see Jesus destroyed. They want him killed. We're so used to the fact that Jesus died. But can you imagine how much you must hate someone to actively go about planning their execution? Do you remember during lockdown? I don't know if you watched it. Do you remember watching Tiger King? An outrageous documentary about this tiger owner. His name was Joe Exotic. And he had this kind of nemesis who was this animal rights activist called Carol Baskin. See that? And you're watching that, and they've got this kind of rivalry. But then as the episodes went on, it got more and more unsettling. And basically, what this guy ended up doing was he hired a hitman to kill his rival, Carol Baskin. He just had this pure, venomous hatred. Folks, that's the reaction Jesus provoked. And I'm talking about the real Jesus,

[8:41] Jesus. Not the Jesus of pop culture, who's soft and friendly, but the real Jesus of the Bible, without doubt, is the most divisive figure in human history. People would either fall at his feet in worship saying, my God, my King, or they would spit in his face in ridicule, crying, crucify, crucify.

And I want to argue that today the real Jesus provokes a similar response. The question is, why? Very simply, because people do not want him to be the king of their lives.

It's very uncomfortable. That was the Pharisees. That was the Herodians. Look, if we went out and spoke to folks in Charleston, if we went and spoke to folks here in Aberdeen and said, who's the king of your life? What are they going to say? It's a weird question. They're certainly not going to say King Charles, are they?

Who's the boss? What are they going to say? I am. I'm the boss of my life. And then when Jesus turns up, he says in effect, no, you're not. You're not in charge. I'm the king.

And not only that, you're a sinner who needs me to save you, and you can only be saved by my grace alone. That is a scandalous message to many.

[10:25] Martin Luther used to say that the natural condition of the human heart is this, and I use this with our guys all the time in our addiction recovery work that we do in Charleston.

We talk about the natural condition of the human heart is to be curved in. We are looking in at ourselves. We think, well, we can be good enough.

If God's there and we have to earn his favor, well, I can be good enough to earn his favor. But the arrival of Jesus says, no, you are not in charge and you will never be good enough.

But you know what the good news is? He is. He's good enough. And I want us to see tonight that it will be impossible for us to see how Jesus is good news if we are looking into ourselves.

And we have to be careful, even as those who follow Jesus, that we don't start drifting back into that. Because you can be self-centered in a very religious way.

[11:33] Remember, it wasn't the atheists that killed Jesus. It was the Bible teachers. These Pharisees. But the way Mark will help us not to curve in is to show us how flawed this kind of self-centeredness is through these examples that we have in the Pharisees.

And then he's going to do something else. He's going to show us how wrong that is. But at the same time, he will show us how good Jesus is. We need to be looking at him.

And so, my three points today, I just want to look at three truths we see about Jesus from that text. Firstly, we see Jesus is the bridegroom who brings rejoicing.

Jesus is the Lord, secondly, who brings rest. And finally, Jesus is the Savior who brings restoration. Let's curve out from ourselves and look at him.

There is good news here. Firstly, then, Jesus is the bridegroom who brings rejoicing. So, what we have in our text are three conflicts that Jesus has around religious practices.

[12:42] But as I said, it's really a conflict between human pride and through trusting Jesus. And the first in verse 18 to 22 is around this issue of fasting.

So, people had clocked that Jesus and his disciples weren't fasting. And this was a big deal. This was very controversial at the time. And to understand why, we need to understand what fasting was about at the time of Jesus.

Remember, all of this is set in Israel. So, Jesus does not arrive in a vacuum. He arrived to God's people, Israel. They were the people that had the promises from God about how he was going to save and restore the world.

They had the promises about the arrival of the Messiah, the King. That's who God's... That's who Jesus comes to. But if you know anything about Israel's history, you know that they made lots of mistakes.

They rebelled against God constantly. I gather you do an exodus in the morning. Right from the beginning, they made constant mistakes. And 600 years before Jesus, God had punished Israel in a severe way by sending an empire called Babylon to wipe most of them out.

[13:55] Those that survived were taken back to Babylon as prisoners. And at that time, what many Israelites began doing was fasting. Fasting was something you did as a sign of repentance.

It was a sign of real sorrow over the sin that you had committed. It was a good thing that God's people did this. And when they returned from Babylon back to their land, that practice of fasting continued.

Until it just kind of became like a normal part of everyday Israelite religious life. You're fast. You're repenting. You're mourning. But Jesus and his disciples were not doing that.

And so when people come up to him and say, hey, what is the deal, Jesus? Why are your disciples not fasting? Look at what Jesus says. And this is astonishing. Verse 19.

Jesus said to them, can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom, they cannot fast.

[15:01] Now to understand why that is such a loaded thing that he has just said, you would need to know a bit about what the Old Testament prophet said. In that time when Israel was mourning and fasting, the prophet spoke of a day when God would come.

And in response to people's repentance, he would save them from their sin forever. And if you look at something like Isaiah 62, for example, Isaiah speaks about that day being like a wedding.

Like when the bridegroom comes through the door. I know today when we have weddings, we're waiting for the bride. Sometimes people are waiting nervously for a long time. But back in the Bible times, back in Jesus' times, you'd be waiting for the groom to arrive.

And when he arrived, party, celebration. And so the prophet said, look, the day is coming when God will come to his people. And it will be a day of rejoicing. It will be a day of celebration.

It will be a day of salvation for Israel and for the nations. Do you see what Jesus has just said here?

[16:15] That day has come. I am the bridegroom. That's why my disciples are not fasting. This is not the time to mourn.

This is the time to celebrate. The anxiety of the engagement period is done. The celebration of the wedding has arrived. Think of my wedding in the run-up to it.

It was pretty stressful. Think maybe more for Kyrene than me, to be honest. I contributed very little. But I contributed to the stress of the day because the night before the wedding, I lost the rings.

So that was stressful. There was times of panic. There was times of frustration. Difficult. It's not a great time. I mean, it's great in some ways, but you're just wanting the day to come.

Can you imagine if I stood up on our wedding day after we'd said the vows and I said to all the guests, sorry folks, we're not going to have a nice meal. We're not going to have a ceilid afterwards. It was so difficult in the run-up to this wedding.

[17:21] Why don't we just eat some bread and listen to Gregorian chants? Be like, what's wrong with you? You're married. She's there.

This has happened. You're going to dwell on the past. Look at where you are now. This is the time to celebrate. You see, this is the fundamental problem that Jesus is going to expose with many of the people in his day.

They are not seeing who he is. This is the bridegroom. If you knew, you would not be in mourning. God's new era of global salvation has arrived.

The old is now past. The new is here. And it's not that the old was unimportant or irrelevant. No, it prepared us for the new. It was the engagement period, but this is the wedding.

Now is the time to celebrate. This is what Jesus means with this illustration in verse 21 to 22. You don't put new unshrunk cloth on an old garment.

[18:24] It will tear. You don't put new wine into old wineskins. They will burst. This new era that has come is not compatible with the old.

Jesus is the fulfillment of everything God had said before. This is the time to rejoice. God has come. The bridegroom is here. Do we see that's who Jesus is, folks?

Sometimes Christians can be so miserable, can't they? And, of course, there are times where that's very appropriate. Following Jesus doesn't mean everything is hunky-dory.

We still hurt. We still live in this broken world. We still sin. We're not going to pretend. Sometimes the joy can seem distant because of what we're going through. And there are seasons in life where that happens.

And you see that with many saints in the Scripture. But if we are miserable all the time, maybe we should ask, have we lost sight of who our Savior is?

[19:28] Are we curving in? Because those who curve in and ignore Jesus will not find a joy that only Jesus can give. If you want to live as the king of your own life, like these Pharisees wanted to do, trying to build your joy upon your achievements or your wants or your desires, it will eventually lead to misery because you will lose it all.

Famous poet Lord Byron once said, there is no joy this world can give that it does not eventually take from you. All you're working for will slip through your hands like sand and you will have no hope.

Because if the big problem with us all is that we're sinners, if that is what we should mourn over, then we must realize that is not a problem we can solve. But if we follow Jesus, we have hope. For the bridegroom has come to solve this. He has come to take that sin, to suffer for our wrong, and to bring us back to Him.

So yes, we still mourn over sin today. Yes, there is a place where we should repent over sin with brokenness. Yes, there's even a place where we should fast as mourning over our sin.

[20:47] But we never do it in a way that keeps us in despair. We take it to Jesus and accept the truth that He has paid for it all by His death on the cross. And so as we mourn over sin, we also have the joy of receiving mercy.

This is why the Apostle Paul can say that the Christian is sorrowful but always rejoicing. We have joy in Jesus that is not like the joy of this world because it does not come from this world.

It comes from Him and His saving grace. This is who He is. Do you know your King has completely forgiven you of everything?

Isn't that the point Mark has been making in chapter 2? That's why He's here. Cleanse the leper to show that He's come to cleanse sin. He healed the paralytic to show that He has the authority to forgive sin.

He ate with Levi to show that He has come for those who sin. He's come for us to forgive us. This is a time of rejoicing. Second thing we see here is that Jesus is the Lord who brings rest.

[21:56] Now, we've got another little showdown that happens at the end of chapter 2 from verse 23 to 28 around the issue of the Sabbath. So, God had set apart a day for His people Israel, one day a week where they were to rest.

It was the Sabbath, a time to rest in God. But what the Pharisees had done at the time of Jesus were taking this wonderful command and twisted and distorted it so that it became a burden to

people.

They had loads of laws. So, God had said, look, don't work on the Sabbath. Find rest in me. But they had all these additional laws about what constituted work.

Let me tell you some of them. They come from a book called the Mishnah. Carrying an object on the Sabbath. Work. Baking bread on the Sabbath. Work.

Writing two or more letters on the Sabbath. Work. Work. I don't know. Tying knots on the Sabbath. Work. And my favorite one, if you pick fleas off your clothes on the Sabbath.

[23:04] Work. So, some very itchy people in the synagogue that day. Missed the whole point. It's not what this day is about. It's not. It twisted it into this thing that was like so burdensome, so heavy.

They were weighing people down with their legalism. And so, when Jesus is walking with His disciples on the Sabbath, and they decide to stop and eat some grain of a nearby field, the Pharisees spot this, and they are fuming.

Goodness knows where they came from. Just hiding in the wheat field like some little legalistic ninjas. And they come and say, verse 24, why are they doing what's not lawful on the Sabbath? Jesus' response is fascinating. Again, hugely controversial. See what He says. He mentions an incident, a story in the Old Testament in verse 25 and 26.

Fairly random story about how when King David was hungry, he entered the house of God and took bread for him and his companions that was only meant for the priests.

[24:15] He broke that law in that moment to address his need. And here's why Jesus mentions this. It's actually a brilliant response.

He mentions this for two reasons. Firstly, to show the Pharisees that they have no understanding of the nature of God's law. God's law was to be a blessing, not a burden, like they had made it.

So, in this story, Jesus is saying, look, even in the Scripture, in the actual laws, not the ones you've made up, even in the Scripture, in that story with David, we can see that human need can sometimes override ceremonial law.

Because this is what you don't understand. The law of God was not given just for the sake of it. It was given to help people.

This is why Jesus reminds the Pharisees of something important in verse 27. It's a bit confusing, but He says that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.

[25:17] What He's saying there is, look, God didn't just lay a kind of seven-day pattern for the world and these rules to be established, and then think, okay, I've got my rules.

Now I'll make mankind to try and fit in to these already established patterns and rules. No, He made mankind first. And because He cares for us, He gave the rule of the Sabbath.

It was given to help us rest in Him. So before we had kids, Kyrie and I didn't create a set of rules that we would fit our kids into. We were not like, rules matter more, we must make the children squeeze into these rules.

No, we had the children, and then as we realized, hey, in order for us to help them, we need to create some rules. Let's not have a wrestling match before bed. Let's not eat a bag of sweets before dinner.

These were rules. It seems like a burden to them, but these are rules to bless them. David knew that was the nature of God's law. It was about helping need, not weighing people down, which is why he took bread on that one occasion of need.

[26:25] But here's the second reason I think Jesus mentions this. David wasn't just any old punter in Israel. David was the Messiah, the king, the one who had a unique authority.

And this is again what the Pharisees, they're not seeing who's in front of them. You don't question Jesus on the Sabbath.

Why? Because as He says here in verse 28, the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath. He stands over it. He invented it. And actually, what it's about was all pointing to Him.

This law was given to show God's people that they need rest in Him. Step aside from your work.

And it's not just this physical rest, but spiritually come with the people of God and find rest in Him.

And that law was to point us to the one who would give an eternal rest for our weary souls, the Lord Jesus. As we come to Him with the burden of our wrong, He takes it from us.

[27:32] He gives us rest. I think for most people in our community in Charleston, the one thing that they all feel is restless. The Lord of the Sabbath has come to give rest to our weary souls by taking the burden of our sin from us.

So we know the rest of not being condemned. We know the rest of being forgiven. We know the rest of being adopted as His child. We know the rest of being held in His arms. And so in this new era, we find rest in Jesus. And we still have that special day. This day, don't we? The New Testament calls it the Lord's Day.

When we gather together and sit under the Word of God. And we find rest for our souls as we see Jesus our Savior. But here's the danger. If we start to curve in on ourselves, we can take what is good and twist it.

We take what should be a blessing to others and we can make it a burden. We add our own rules. Maybe it's literally about what we do on a Sunday. We can be in danger of keeping the Sabbath but forgetting the Lord of the Sabbath.

[28:42] Or it could be in other areas. How people dress. How they raise their kids. What music they should listen to. Rules that we make that are not God's rules. And if it becomes all about rules that you have added, what will happen is that you will start to look down on people.

They've not kept your rules. And then you will stop looking to God. As C.S. Lewis once said, if you spend all your time looking down on others, you have little time to look up to God.

That is the Pharisees. Might wear the mask of religion. But their perspective is looking in. Friends, let's be careful of the pharisaical heart that wants to exalt self over showing grace to others.

That wants to burden people and tell them how wrong they are. Rather than bless them by pointing them to the Lord who gives them rest from all their sin. Jesus is the bridegroom who brings rejoicing.

Jesus is the Lord who gives rest. And finally, we see here, just as we close, Jesus is the Savior who brings restoration. Just look with me briefly at chapter 3, verse 1 to 6.

[30:00] Here we have another controversy around the Sabbath. What is interesting about this incident, before it's kind of Jesus in the dock, as it were. They're trying to quiz Him.

Now it's flipped right around. And Jesus is going to expose these Pharisees. And they won't like it. I mean, who likes to have their hypocrisy exposed?

Jesus shines a light on the sinful heart. But as the Apostle John says in his gospel, men hate that light because they want to live in darkness. Why do people hate Jesus?

Because they would rather live in darkness. It's like if your room is a tip and then someone comes in and they put the light on, you want to switch it off. Don't look. Don't see the mess that I've made here.

Why do these religious people hate Jesus? Because Jesus switches the light on in their heart and shows what's really going on. You see that here. What happens is they're in the synagogue.

[31:01] There's a man present with a withered hand. Jesus is there. Everyone knows He can heal this man. Isn't that striking? Nobody's questioning His ability to do miracles.

What they're looking for is, is He going to do it today? So Jesus gets the man up in front of everyone. And He turns to the Pharisees and asks them a very simple question.

Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm? To save life or to kill? No. That's the question. If they say, don't heal Him, they are saying, well, we should do harm and we should kill on the Sabbath.

But if they say, well, you should heal Him, then they've just broken their own little rule that they're trying to condemn Jesus with. Jesus has just shone a light on their religious hypocrisy.

And the silence they respond with speaks volumes. And it makes the Lord Jesus so fuming mad. Do you see how He responded?

[32:11] He is raging that they could be so callous, hiding behind their religiosity. But that's not the Lord Jesus.

And so He takes that man in front of all of them. He tells him to stretch out His hand. And the man stretches out His hand. And he is completely restored.

And verse 6 shows us that in healing this man, Jesus now from this point has effectively signed His death warrant. In other words, for this man to be restored, it meant Jesus had to die.

And that is what He does for us. You see, this great King, why does Mark put the death of Jesus right here at the start? Why does Mark spend more time talking about the death of Jesus than any moment?

Because that's the moment He will save us. For us to be restored, He would have to die. He died so we could live.

