

Mark 2:13-28
June 11, 2023

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: How have you seen religious rules or institutions hurt people? [Let people engage]

Transition: The Pharisees and teachers of the law were rule followers! And it aggravated them to no end every time they saw Jesus or His disciples break one! The Pharisees were astounded when it became evident that Jesus was deliberately associating Himself with sinners and the outcasts of Jewish society. He even called a tax collector to become one of His disciples! The next thing you know, the Pharisees are incredulous when they see Jesus and His disciples in the grainfields picking heads of grain on the Sabbath day. It was unlawful to do that since that was considered “work.”

Jesus’s ministry was all about seeking and saving the lost, and He knew that the Jewish Law was hurting people. **He modeled putting the accent on human need, not following a set of rules.** Let’s read Mark’s account starting in 2:13-28. Would someone volunteer to read this text aloud?

BOOK:

2

The Calling of Levi

¹³ Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. ¹⁴ 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.

¹⁵ 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. 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’?”

¹⁷ 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.”

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. If he does, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse. ²² And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, he pours new wine into new wineskins.”

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.”

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

We can be so wrapped up in the system that we lose sight of our purpose. We must remember that there is never any finality in the system or the methods. There is finality in our message, but the new wine will not long be contained in old wineskins. The wineskins of method are easily antiquated. We must remain willing to let the system go, but preserve the new wine at all costs.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Fulfillment (Mark 2:13–22)

It soon became evident that Jesus was deliberately associating Himself with the outcasts of Jewish society. He even called a tax collector to become one of His disciples! We do not know that Levi was a dishonest man, though most of the tax collectors were; but the fact that he worked for Herod Antipas and the Romans was enough to disgrace him among loyal Jews. However, when Jesus called him, Levi did not argue or delay. He got up and followed Jesus, even though he knew that Rome would never give him back his job. He burned his bridges (“And he left everything behind”—Luke 5:28, NASB), received a new name (“Matthew, the gift of God”), and enthusiastically invited some of his “sinner” friends to meet the Lord Jesus. These were Jewish people like himself who did not follow the Law or appear to have much interest in things religious. It was exactly the kind of people Jesus wanted to reach.

Of course, the critics had to be there; but our Lord used their questions to teach the guests about Himself and the spiritual work He came to do. He explained His mission by using three interesting comparisons.

The Physician (vv. 16–17). Jesus did not consider these people “rejects,” even though they had been excommunicated by the religious leaders. Matthew’s friends were *patients* who needed a physician, and Jesus was that Physician. We have already seen that sin may be compared to sickness and forgiveness to having your health restored. Now we see that our Savior may be compared to a physician: He comes to us in our need; He makes a perfect diagnosis; He provides a final and complete cure; and *He pays the bill!* What a physician!

But there are three kinds of “patients” whom Jesus cannot heal of their sin sickness: (1) those who do not know about Him; (2) those who know about Him but refuse to trust Him; and (3) those who will not admit that they need Him. The scribes and Pharisees were in that third category, as are all self-righteous sinners today. Unless we admit that we are sinners, deserving of God’s judgment, we cannot be saved. Jesus saves only sinners (Luke 19:10).

In Jesus’ day, as in the days of the prophets, there were those who claimed to bring spiritual healing to the people, but whose remedies were ineffective. Jeremiah rebuked the priests and false prophets of his day because they were worthless physicians who gave only a false hope to the nation. “They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, ‘Peace, peace’; when there is no peace” (Jer. 6:14; 8:11). They applied their weak medicines to the surface symptoms and did not get down deep into the basic problem—the sinful heart (Jer. 17:9). We must beware of such worthless physicians today.

The Bridegroom (vv. 18–20). While the first question they asked had to do with the kind of company Jesus was keeping, their second question raised the issue of why Jesus was having such a good time with these people at the table. His conduct, to them, seemed inappropriate. John the Baptist was an austere man, somewhat of a recluse; but Jesus accepted invitations to meals, played with the children, and enjoyed social gatherings (Matt. 11:16–19). No doubt John’s disciples were a bit scandalized to see Jesus at a party, and the pious disciples of the Pharisees (see Matt. 23:15) were quick to join them in their perplexity.

Jesus had already made it clear that He came to convert the sinners, not to compliment the self-righteous. Now He told them that he had come to bring gladness, not sadness. Thanks to the legalism imposed by the scribes and Pharisees, the Jewish religion had become a burdensome thing. The poor people were weighed down by rules and regulations that were impossible to obey

(Matt. 23:4). “Life is not supposed to be a funeral!” Jesus told them. “God wants life to be a wedding feast! I am the Bridegroom and these people are My wedding guests. Are not wedding guests supposed to have a good time?”

The Jews knew that marriage was one of the pictures used in the Old Testament to help explain Israel’s relationship to the Lord. They had been “married to Jehovah” and they belonged only to Him (Isa. 54:5; Jer. 31:32). When the nation turned to foreign gods, as they often did, they committed “spiritual adultery.” They were unfaithful to their Husband, and they had to be disciplined. The major theme of Hosea is God’s love for His adulterous wife and His desire to restore the nation to His favor once again.

John the Baptist had already announced that Jesus was the Bridegroom (John 3:29), and our Lord had performed His first miracle at a joyous marriage feast (John 2:1–11). Now He was inviting people to come to the wedding! After all, becoming a Christian is not unlike entering into the marriage relationship (see Rom. 7:4—“that ye should be married to another”). Two people are not married just because they know each other, or even because they have strong feelings about each other. In order to be married, they must commit themselves to each other and make this commitment known. In most societies, the man and woman publicly affirm this commitment when each says, “I do!”

Salvation from sin involves much more than a person knowing about Christ, or even having “good feelings” toward Christ. Salvation comes when the sinner commits himself or herself to Jesus Christ and says, “I do!” Then the believer immediately enters into the joys of this spiritual marriage relationship: bearing His name; sharing His wealth and power; enjoying His love and protection; and one day living in His glorious home in heaven. When you are “married to Christ,” life becomes a wedding feast, in spite of trials and difficulties.

Mark 2:20 is a hint of our Lord’s anticipated death, resurrection, and return to heaven. It is unlikely that His disciples, at that early stage in their training, even understood what He meant. However, Jesus was not suggesting that His absence from earth would mean that His followers would have to replace the feast with a funeral! He was only pointing out that occasional fasting would be proper at a future time, but that joyful celebration should be the normal experience of believers.

The garment and the wineskins (vv. 21–22). Jesus taught two important lessons about His ministry: (1) He came to save sinners, not to call the religious; and (2) He came to bring gladness and not sadness. The third lesson is this: He came to introduce the new, not to patch up the old.

The religious leaders were impressed with our Lord’s teaching, and perhaps they would have been happy to make some of His ideas a part of their own religious tradition. They were hoping for some kind of compromise that would retain the best of pharisaic Judaism and the best of what Christ had to offer. But Jesus exposed the folly of that approach. It would be like tearing patches from a new unshrunk garment and sewing them on an old garment. You would ruin the new garment; and when the old garment was washed, the patches would shrink, rip away, and ruin that garment too (note Luke 5:36–39). Or, it would be like putting new unfermented wine in old brittle wineskins. As soon as the wine began to ferment and the gases formed, the old skins would burst—and you would lose both the wine and the skins.

Jesus came to usher in the new, not to unite with the old. The Mosaic economy was decaying, getting old, and ready to vanish away (Heb. 8:13). Jesus would establish a New Covenant in His blood (Luke 22:19–20). The Law would be written on human hearts, not on stones (2 Cor. 3:1–3; Heb. 10:15–18); and the indwelling Holy Spirit would enable God’s people to fulfill the righteousness of the Law (Rom. 8:1–4).

By using this illustration, Jesus refuted once and for all the popular idea of a compromising “world religion.” Well-meaning but spiritually blind leaders have suggested that we take “the best” from each religion, blend it with what is “best” in the Christian faith, and thus manufacture a synthetic faith that would be acceptable to everybody. But the Christian faith is *exclusive* in character; it will not accept any other faith as its equal or its superior. “There is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

Salvation is not a partial patching up of one’s life; it is a whole new robe of righteousness (Isa. 61:10; 2 Cor. 5:21). The Christian life is not a mixing of the old and the new; rather, it is a fulfillment of the old in the new. There are two ways to destroy a thing: you can smash it, or you can permit it to fulfill itself. An acorn, for example, can be smashed with a hammer, or it can be planted and allowed to grow into an oak. In both instances, the destruction of the acorn is accomplished; but in the second instance, the acorn is destroyed by being fulfilled.

Jesus fulfilled the prophecies, types, and demands of the Law of Moses. The Law was ended at Calvary when the perfect sacrifice was once offered for the sins of the world (Heb. 8–10). When you trust Jesus Christ, you become part of a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17), and there are always new experiences of grace and glory. How tragic when people hold on to dead religious tradition when they could lay hold of living spiritual truth. Why cherish the shadows when the reality has come? (Heb. 10:1ff) In Jesus Christ we have the fulfillment of all that God promised (2 Cor. 1:20).

Freedom (Mark 2:23–2:27)

The Sabbath was cherished by the Jews as a sacred institution. God gave the people of Israel the Sabbath after they came out of Egypt (Ex. 20:8–11; Neh. 9:14), and it was a special sign between Israel and Jehovah (Ex. 31:13–17). There is no record in Scripture that God ever gave the Sabbath to any other nation. So, when Jesus began openly to violate the Sabbath traditions, it was like declaring war against the religious establishment. He began His campaign by healing a man who had been sick for thirty-eight years (John 5), and then followed with the events recorded in this section.

Jewish tradition stated that there were thirty-nine acts that were strictly forbidden on the Sabbath. Moses had prohibited work on the Sabbath, but he did not give many specifics (Ex. 20:10). It was wrong to kindle a fire for cooking (Ex. 35:3), gather fuel (Num. 15:32ff), carry burdens (Jer. 17:21ff), or transact business (Neh. 10:31; 13:15, 19). But Jewish tradition went into great detail and even informed the people how far they could travel on the Sabbath (200 cubits, based on Josh. 3:4). In short, the Sabbath Day had become a crushing burden, a symbol of the galling religious bondage that had captured the nation.

After healing the man at the Pool of Bethesda, our Lord’s next act of “Sabbath defiance” was to walk through the fields on the Sabbath and permit His disciples to pluck the grain, rub it between their hands, and eat it. It was not illegal for a hungry person to take some of his neighbor’s fruit or grain, provided he did not fill a vessel or use a harvesting implement (Deut. 23:24–25). However, that was not what upset the Pharisees. What upset them was that the disciples had worked on the Sabbath Day!

Grassmick, J. D. (1985). *Mark*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 113-115) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

2. THE CALL OF LEVI AND EATING WITH SINNERS (2:13–17) (Matt. 9:9–13; Luke 5:27–32)

2:13. **Jesus went out** from Capernaum to **the lake** (Sea of Galilee) **once again** (cf. 1:16). To summarize His activity, Mark stated that Jesus was teaching **a large crowd** which kept on coming **to hear Him**. His withdrawal from populous centers is a recurring pattern in Mark (cf. 1:45; 2:13; 3:7, 13; 4:1; 5:21; etc.) and recalls the “wilderness” theme (cf. 1:4, 12–13, 35, 45).

2:14. Capernaum was a customs post on the caravan route from Damascus to the Mediterranean Sea. **Levi** (surnamed Matthew; cf. 3:18; Matt. 9:9; 10:3) was a Jewish **tax** official in the service of Herod Antipas, the ruler of Galilee (see the chart on the Herods at Luke 1:5). For such service, often involving fraudulent practices, these officials were despised by the Jews. Yet Jesus extended to Levi a gracious call to **follow Him** and leave his old calling behind (cf. Mark 1:17–18).

2:15–16. Shortly afterward, Levi gave a **dinner** for **Jesus** and **His disciples**. This is the first mention (of 43) in Mark of the “disciples” as a distinct group. Mark added an editorial comment explaining that **there were** many (disciples) **who followed** Jesus, not just the five mentioned so far in Mark’s Gospel.

Eating with Jesus were **many tax collectors** (Levi’s former associates) and **“sinners,”** a technical term for common people regarded by the Pharisees as untaught in the Law, who did not abide by rigid pharisaic standards. For Jesus and His disciples to share a meal (an expression of trust and fellowship) with them offended **the Law** teachers **who were Pharisees**. The Pharisees, the most influential religious party in Palestine, were deeply devoted to the Mosaic Law. They strictly regulated their lives by the supposedly binding interpretations of it passed down in oral tradition and were meticulous about maintaining ceremonial purity (cf. 7:1–5). They criticized Jesus for not being a separatist, for failing to observe their pious distinction between “the righteous” (they themselves) and “the **sinners**.”

2:17. **Jesus** answered their criticism with a well-known proverb (recognized as valid by His opponents) and a statement of His mission which vindicated His conduct. The words, **the righteous**, are used ironically to refer to those who saw themselves as such, namely, the Pharisees (cf. Luke 16:14–15). They saw no need to repent and believe (cf. Mark 1:15). But Jesus knew that everyone, including “the righteous,” are sinful. He came (into the world) to call **sinners**, those who humbly acknowledge their need and receive His gracious forgiveness, to God’s kingdom. This was why Jesus ate with sinners (cf. 2:5–11, 19–20).

3. THE DISCUSSION ABOUT FASTING AND THE NEW SITUATION (2:18–22) (Matt. 9:14–17; Luke 5:33–39)

2:18. Mark’s initial statement explained that **John’s disciples** (John the Baptist’s remaining followers) **and the Pharisees** (and their disciples or adherents) **were fasting**, presumably while Jesus and His disciples were feasting at Levi’s house. The Old Testament prescribed fasting for all Jews only on the annual Day of Atonement, as an act of repentance (Lev. 16:29), but the Pharisees promoted voluntary fasts on every Monday and Thursday (cf. Luke 18:12) as an act of piety. In response to a critical inquiry, **Jesus** showed the incongruity of **fasting** for His disciples (Mark 2:19–22), though He allowed it if practiced properly (cf. Matt. 6:16–18).

2:19–20. Jesus’ counterquestion set up a comparison and a veiled analogy to Himself. As it is inappropriate for **guests** (lit., “sons of the bridal chamber,” the groom’s attendants) to **fast** (an expression of sorrow) in the presence **of the bridegroom**, so it was inappropriate for Jesus’ disciples to fast (in sorrow) **while He** was **with them**.

His presence with them constituted a situation as joyous as a wedding festival. **But** this situation would change, for **the time** (lit., “days”) would **come when the Bridegroom** (Jesus) would **be taken** (*aparthē*, implying violent removal; cf. Isa. 53:8) **from them and on that day** (His crucifixion) the disciples would **fast** in the metaphorical sense of experiencing sorrow in place of joy. This allusion to His coming death is the first hint of the Cross in Mark’s Gospel.

2:21–22. For the first time Mark used two of Jesus’ parables, both of which had broader relevance than to fasting. Jesus’ presence with His people was a time of newness (fulfillment) and signaled the passing of the old.

An attempt to bind the newness of the gospel to the old religion of Judaism is as futile as trying to **patch an old** (*palaion*, “worn out by use”) **garment** with a new, **unshrunk** piece of **cloth**. When **the new** (*kainon*, “qualitatively new”) **piece** (*plērōma*, “fullness”) becomes wet, it **will shrink, pull away from the old**, and make a larger hole.

It is equally disastrous to pour **new** (*neon*, “fresh”), not fully fermented **wine into old** (*palaious*, “worn out by use,” with no elasticity, brittle) **wineskins**. Inevitably, as **the new wine** ferments (expands), it **will burst the skins and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined**. Salvation, available through Jesus, was not to be mixed with the old Judaistic system (cf. John 1:17).

4. THE PICKING AND EATING OF GRAIN ON THE SABBATH (2:23–28) (Matt. 12:1–8; Luke 6:1–5)

2:23–24. While walking on a footpath **through** someone’s **grainfields** one **Sabbath**, Jesus’ **disciples ... began picking some heads of grain** to eat. This was legitimate (Deut. 23:25), but **the Pharisees** viewed it as reaping, an act of work forbidden **on the Sabbath** (cf. Ex. 34:21), so they demanded an explanation from **Jesus**.

2:25–26. In response Jesus appealed to Scripture and a precedent set by **David and his companions** when they **were hungry and in need** (1 Sam. 21:1–6). The words “his companions” and “in need” are key elements in this incident. David **entered the** tabernacle court, requested **the consecrated bread** (cf. Lev. 24:5–9) which was restricted by Mosaic legislation to **the priests** (cf. Lev. 24:9) and **gave some to his** men. Jesus used this action which God did not condemn, to show that the Pharisees’ narrow interpretation of the Law blurred God’s intention. The spirit of the Law in respect to human need took priority over its ceremonial regulations.

Mark stated that David’s action occurred **in the days of Abiathar the high priest**, but the high priest was actually Abimelech, his father (1 Sam. 21:1). A plausible explanation is to render the introductory phrase: “in the passage about Abiathar, the high priest” (cf. parallel phrase in Mark 12:26). This was a customary Jewish way of indicating the section of the Old Testament where a desired incident could be found. Abiathar became high priest shortly after Abimelech and proved more prominent than he, thus justifying the use of his name here.

2:27–28. With the words, **Then He said to them**, Mark appended two principles: (1) He quoted Jesus’ words that **the Sabbath was** instituted (by God) **for** mankind’s benefit and refreshment, **not** that people were made to keep burdensome regulations pertaining to it. (2) Mark concluded (**so**, in light of vv. 23–27) with an editorial comment (cf. v. 10) on the meaning of Jesus’ statement for his readers. **The Son of Man** (cf. 8:31) **is Lord** (Master) **even of the Sabbath**; He has sovereign authority over its use, as the next incident demonstrates.

Church, C.L. (1998). *Mark In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), Holman Concise Bible Commentary (p. 431). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.*

BOLD WITNESS (2:13–17)

The toll-collector Levi, like the earlier disciples, abandoned his livelihood—here the customs table—to follow Jesus. “Sinners” included not only immoral persons but those whose occupations prevented their keeping the strict Pharisaic interpretation of the law. Jesus’ association with such persons recalls His identification with sinners at His baptism (1:4, 9). This table fellowship occasioned the second “conflict” with the scribes, culminating in Jesus’ defense of His—and His disciples’—mission: “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.” Only sinners could respond to Jesus’ call to “repent and believe in the good news” (1:15) of God’s forgiveness and acceptance.

CONFLICT (2:18–3:6)

Mark’s third “conflict” concerns fasting. Jesus argued that the time of His ministry was a time of joy, like a wedding party, when fasting was inappropriate. The images of new cloth and new wine illustrate the “revolutionary” affect of God’s new work in Jesus. What the Jewish leadership feared was true: Jesus was bursting the old categories of Judaism.

Mark’s fourth and fifth “conflicts” concern Sabbath observance. The Pharisees interpreted plucking grain as “reaping,” an illegal activity on the Sabbath (Exod. 34:21). Jesus’ response was two-fold. The goal of Sabbath observance was human benefit, and Jesus’ “Son of Man” means I had authority over the Sabbath. The Pharisees likewise took the law to prohibit healing unless life was in danger. Mark again recorded Jesus’ anger, anger at callousness toward human need and at willful blindness to the deeper goals of the Sabbath—doing good and saving life. The five “conflict” stories conclude with an unlikely coalition of Herodians and Pharisees—political collaborators and orthodox religionists—rejecting Jesus’ authority and plotting His destruction.

Leavell, L.P. (1972). Mark. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), The Teacher’s Bible Commentary (pp. 619-621). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.

Criticism (Mark 2:1–2:28)

The passage—In chapter 2 through 3:6 we see the criticism of Jesus growing among the scribes and Pharisees. They were critical because he forgave sin. It was their belief that no one could forgive sin save God only. Since they did not acknowledge Jesus as God, they judged his actions to be blasphemy. In Old Testament times those guilty of blasphemy were sentenced to die by stoning.

There was widespread belief in those days that physical maladies were a result of sin. The friends of Job thought him to be guilty of gross sin because he suffered so. It naturally followed in their thinking that restoration depended upon forgiveness. Perhaps it was for this reason that Jesus first forgave the sin of a victim of palsy (2:1–12). The Pharisees had no way of knowing whether or not the man’s sins were actually forgiven. The man knew, but Jesus provided the proof in commanding him to take his bed and carry it out.

In 2:13–17 we find the call of Matthew. It has been pointed out that he left everything except his quill. His sacrifice was greater initially than that of the fishermen apostles, for he could not return to this political position of tax-collector.

The Pharisees were horrified when Jesus went into the home of a despised publican to eat a meal. Jesus made no effort to defend these people and their sin, but stated their need. Publicans had plenty of money. Their problems were not economic. Adequate financial resources,

however, cannot solve the problems of personal sin. These were spiritually sick and needed the Great Physician.

In 2:18–22, Jesus is criticized for refusing to fast. The only fast prescribed in the Torah was on the Day of Atonement. The oral tradition had developed so far beyond the Torah that every Monday and Thursday were designated as fast days. Jesus did not approve fasting for fasting's sake. It is not necessarily a mark of piety because the calendar indicates it is time to fast. This practice becomes meaningful when transcendent values are given priority, causing mundane, lesser things to fade into insignificance.

It is likely that 2:19–20 reveal the shadow of the cross falling upon Jesus. He referred to himself as the bridegroom, and pointed to a time when he would not be with them.

In 2:21–22 Jesus showed the incompatibility between the Jewish system and Christianity. The Jewish system, like an old garment, had served over a long period of time. The Christian faith is not an appendage to be sewn on an old garment. Ritual forms, ritual sacrifices, and special days are outward expressions only. The Christian faith, like new wine, cannot be contained in the vehicle of the old system.

In 2:23 through 3:6 we find two criticisms centering in sabbath regulations. Jewish leaders had reduced their sabbath laws to a total of thirty-four. Under each of these thirty-four laws there were six divisions!

The feeling of some Jews toward the Sabbath was so strong that they would not defend themselves on the sabbath. Military enemies, knowing this about the Jews, sometimes attacked on the sabbath, knowing the Jews would not resist.

The Pharisees' concept of faith centered in the word "ritual." As long as they did the right thing at the right time, they felt themselves to be orthodox and acceptable to God. Jesus taught that man's highest expression of faith was not in ritual but in service. The sabbath as an institution should not receive top priority. The sabbath was made for man, not vice versa.

Special points—The word which Jesus spoke in 2:2 was the gospel. It included his own identity and the fulfilment of the messianic promise.

Fasting has validity today when associated with supreme values. When preoccupied over the illness of a loved one, fasting comes easily. When we are wrapped up in spiritual concerns, the thought of food is secondary. Fasting today should be Christ honoring, not for promotion of self.

Truth for today—The incident in 2:15 f. points up an aspect of Christian responsibility. We are responsible to those considered to be outcasts from society. They are sometimes well-to-do, like these publicans, as well as the economically disadvantaged.

In 2:21–22 Jesus sounded a relevant warning. We can be so wrapped up in the system that we lose sight of our purpose. We must remember that there is never any finality in the system or the methods. There is finality in our message, but the new wine will not long be contained in old wineskins. The wineskins of method are easily antiquated. We must remain willing to let the system go, but preserve the new wine at all costs.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). Mark 2:13-28. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.