

## **"When Jesus Steals Your Bottle of Religion Pills and Flushes Them Down the Toilet"**

**Mark 2:18-22**

**28 January 2018**

Please turn in your Bibles to Mark chapter 2. We're continuing our series *Binge-watching Jesus* and I don't know about you, but this series has been so good for my soul. I have needed to sit and binge-watch Jesus. I have needed to see how merciful and compassionate He is to sinners. I never get tired of hearing Jesus say,

*"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."* Matthew 11:28-30

I love that! I never tire of hearing Jesus say those words to me.

And what Jesus will remind us of today, in these verses, is something I've told you before, in fact, it was the big idea of the very first sermon that I ever preached here, and it's this-

**FOCUS ON YOUR SAVIOR, NOT ON YOUR BEHAVIOR.**

Just like in Jesus' day, believers have a tendency to obsess over their performance. We have a tendency to focus on what we are or aren't doing. Are we praying enough? Did we read enough of the Bible today? Are we serving as much as we can? Did I give enough money in the offering? We have a tendency to focus on what we are or aren't doing. And when we do this, we don't enjoy the Lord. When we obsess over our behavior, whether good or bad, we don't enjoy Jesus.

When we obsess over our behavior, whether good or bad, we either end up despairing over our lack of obedience or our lack of commitment, or, if we're doing pretty good in our eyes, then we begin to fill up with pride. And that pride can and will lead us to look down on others. When we obsess over our spiritual lives, obsess over our behavior, whether good or bad, it always leads to either despair or pride.

And Jesus is going to confront this very thing in our passage today. Jesus wants to teach us that our focus should be on our Savior, and not on our behavior.

LOOK AT VERSE 18...

*Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. And people came and said to him, "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" And 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 then 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."*

So Jesus is approached by a group of people who question Him as to why His disciples do not fast, because John's disciples fasted and so did the Pharisees. So they wanna know why the disciples of Jesus are breaking with cultural norms and not fasting. But what we need to understand as we make our way through Mark's gospel is just how controlling the Pharisees were. They are in the background of this question. They were the spiritual pacesetters in Israel. And they fasted every Monday and Thursday and so they expected everyone else to fast on Mondays and Thursdays too.

So when Jesus and the disciples are not fasting according to the cultural norms that the Pharisees put in place, people begin to wonder why. They want to know why Jesus is breaking away from the cultural norms that were cemented into society. And, as you can guess, the Pharisees are not going to be excited about some new Rabbi that does not encourage His disciples to fast as they have said. They are not going to like this new guy who is breaking away from tradition.

Now, it's just another manic Monday or Thursday in Israel and people notice that Jesus and His disciples are hanging out at *Chick-fil-A* and they are enjoying some waffle fries. And this group approaches their table and asks them, *"Why don't y'all fast? Why are y'all eating waffle fries on a Thursday?"* And Jesus replied, *"Because it's party time!"*

Jesus actually answered by asking them a question. I love that about Jesus. He wants them to think. He wants them to come up with the answer as they logically think through what He is saying. So Jesus asks them about what happens at a wedding: *"Do people fast at a wedding? Do people eat the catered meal from The Far Western or do they fast?"* The answer, of course, is that people eat, people party at a wedding because that's appropriate. When you go to a wedding it's a happy time. You dance. You party.

You eat. You enjoy the festivities. What you don't do is fast. After all, it's a free meal, right?

And this is where knowing the Jewish culture at the time is helpful. Weddings were a big deal. And they would last for days, usually about 7 days. So it was a 7-day party. Guests had no responsibility but to enjoy the festivities. So a wedding was 7 days and 6 nights in *Flavortown*. It was a celebration. A party. There was an abundance of food, wine, singing, dancing, fun in the house, fun out in the streets, fun in the bounce houses out in the streets. It was like a block party- the music was pumping, and bounce houses were bouncing, and you didn't want to bounce out of there early. You came to enjoy the celebration.

And it lasted several days. And while the groom was there, or the bride for that matter, you partied! You were happy for them. You celebrated their presence by eating and drinking and dancing and having a good time. What you didn't do was sit in the corner and refuse to eat. That would be out of place. That would be unacceptable.

And that's Jesus' point about why His posse doesn't fast. They will fast, He says in verse 20, after He dies on the cross, is resurrected, and then is taken away to Heaven and ascends to the right hand of God the Father. They will fast on that day. But now, Jesus is saying, "*The Bridegroom is here. It's time to party!*" Jesus is here. He is with His disciples and this is not a time to fast. It's a time to celebrate. To dance. To party. To enjoy the Lord.

Let me ask you: Would you fast at a Super Bowl party? Would you turn down chips and queso? Would you refuse a *Dr. Pepper*? No! Of course not! Especially if you're a Texan, because you spell "*party*" in Texas this way: *Chips and queso and Dr. Pepper*. Nobody in their right mind fasts during a Super Bowl party because it's a time to celebrate- a time to celebrate the defeat of the New England Patriots, which I'm praying happens next Sunday. I might even pray *and fast* that that happens! I hate the Patriots. I love Jesus and I hate the Patriots. That's my life in a summary. I don't love Jesus as much as I should and I probably hate the Patriots more than I should. Maybe not that last part!

But in Jesus' day, fasting became a guide by which the Pharisees judged people and puffed themselves up. And that's exactly what happens when you judge people: *you tear them down and puff yourself up*. So the Pharisees took this man-made rule that they came up with— fasting on Mondays and Thursdays— and if you didn't do that, they would judge you and look down on you.

The Old Testament law only required fasting once a year, on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:29-30). Of course, you could fast any time you wanted, but it was only required on the Day of Atonement. But the Pharisees came up with other traditions that they elevated up to the place of God's law. They had all kinds of rules and regulations that they expected everyone to keep. And they elevated their traditions right next to God's law, so that if you broke their rules, you were, in their eyes, breaking God's laws. And they decided that everyone should fast on Mondays and Thursdays (see *The Mishnah*, "*Taanith*").

So, you'd be at *In-N-Out* for lunch on a Monday or Thursday, and you'd be taking a bite of your Double-Double, and just as you were taking a bite of that delicious, God-given blessing, a Pharisee would be walking by and see you, and give you "that look." And then he would walk away totally puffed up and feeling good about himself because he was so spiritual, but deep down he couldn't wait until midnight because *In-N-Out* is still open at midnight, so when the clock struck 12, and it was officially Tuesday, he'd hightail it to *In-and-Out* so he could enjoy a Double-Double.

The Pharisees basically walked around with scorecards. They would have agreed with the apostle Paul that "*all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory*" (Romans 3:23), but that didn't stop them from comparing distances! They were always checking on people. Always looking for fruit in people's lives. They were the original, "fruit police." And we become like them, we become like the Pharisees when we begin to nit-pick our brothers and sisters in Christ. We become like little kids and we tattletale on each other. Understand this: God the Father is able to parent His children. He doesn't need our help. As Peter says in 1 Peter 1:17, "*And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile...*"

God deals with each one of His children individually. He "judges," present tense, each believer and deals with each believer- without input from his or her siblings! God doesn't need, God doesn't want tattletales in His family. He doesn't want us running around trying to be the police, monitoring everybody's spiritual condition. We're not here to call each other out all the time. We're supposed to call on our Heavenly Father who judges impartially each person's deeds. We're supposed to conduct *ourselves* with fear, not conduct others. We're supposed to watch over our own heart, not sift through other people's hearts and motives, as if we actually could see and determine someone's heart motives. We can't.

Ray Ortlund tweeted this last week: A "*one another*" command I can't find in the New Testament:

"Humble one another."

That's what the Pharisees were doing. They were trying to humble others by their righteousness. Always focusing on other people instead of dealing with their own sin, their own heart.

Of course, this doesn't mean that we turn a blind eye to how people are living. If someone is living in unrepentant sin, and by unrepentant sin, I mean they are hard-hearted and they say something like- "I don't want to change. I know this wrong. I know God's word says this is sin, but I'm not giving it up and I'm not changing"- if someone is living like that, then, yes, we are called to intervene. We're called to go to them. We're called to call them back to Jesus. And it's called church discipline. We're called to help them get restored to Jesus.

But how many Christians try to be the "fruit police?" Always running around trying to keep people in line. That's not grace, that's law. Grace connects you to a person, to Jesus, to a Redeemer, not to rules. Grace sets you free; it doesn't put you back in chains. Grace gives you wings so that you can fly. Grace is not a tattletale. Grace connects you to a Redeemer, not rules.

And that means that we don't have to look at others to see if they're staying in line, because our focus is supposed to be on Jesus. We're not supposed to focus on what our brothers and sisters in the family are up to- what they are doing or not doing.

Understand this: Grace frees you to quit being a tattletale. Grace frees you to quit being holier than thou. Grace frees you to quit trying to be a kingdom monitor. Grace frees you to quit being a part of the fruit police. And Steve Brown is very helpful here. He says,

*"If you use the law to judge others, go ahead, but don't assume that your judgment mimics the judgment of God... The good news is that Christ frees us from the need to obnoxiously focus on our goodness, our commitment, and our correctness. Religion has made us obsessive almost beyond endurance. Jesus invited us to a dance...and we've turned in into a march of soldiers, always checking to see if we're doing it right and are in step and in line with the other soldiers. We know a dance would be more fun, but we believe we must go through hell to get to heaven, so we keep marching."* (A Scandalous Freedom: The Radical Nature of the Gospel, p.82)

Making other people holy is God's job, not ours. Please let me say that again: *Making other people holy is God's job, not ours.* Humbling others is not a part of our job description. Convicting others is not our job. "Humble one another" is not in the Bible. Our focus is to be on Jesus. And I think Jesus would be okay with me tweaking our big idea for just a moment-

### **FOCUS ON YOUR SAVIOR, NOT ON OTHER PEOPLE'S BEHAVIOR.**

Holiness, being sanctified, being set apart to God, being different, will never be a reality for us unless we care more about Jesus than holiness! Holiness will never be a reality for us unless we care more about Jesus than holiness, care more about Jesus than getting better, care more about Jesus than seeing others getting better. Most of us just want to be holy so that we can feel better about ourselves and feel that we are better than others! Please let me say *that* again: Most of us just want to be holy so that we can 1) feel better about ourselves and 2) feel that we are better than others! That's the Pharisees.

So we fall into the trap of making sure we're staying in line and others are staying in line. We've turned the Christian life into a march of soldiers. "Ten hut! Get in line, soldier! Ten Hut! Start marching, son!" We've turned the Christian life into a march of soldiers and it's supposed to be a dance! We're supposed to be free, Grace! And grace is what makes us free! Grace, God's unmerited favor for rascals and rebels like us, that's what motivates us to obedience. Grace is what motivates us to holiness. Grace is what motivates us to think and act differently.

Is the Christian life a life of war? Yes. We are in a battle. The Bible clearly paints that picture. We are in a battle against our sin and against the forces of evil in the spiritual world. I'm not denying that at all. That's part of it. Every day we have to put sin to death by the power of the Spirit. That is part of it. But another part of the way that we do battle is by dancing! Part of the way that we do battle against sin and against the forces of evil is by enjoying the Lord! By dancing! By partying! By being free! By really believing the radical nature of grace!

But for the Pharisees and religious leaders in Jesus' day, everybody was wrong. Everybody fell short of God's glory, but they wanted to compare distances. And no one measured up to their standard. Only they did. How convenient! And that's why these people ask Jesus about fasting. The Pharisees had a grip on everyone. I think they were lurking in the background here. But please understand: Jesus is not against fasting in verses 19-20. He's not against fasting at all. After all, He fasted for 40 days! If Jesus was anti-

fast, trust me, He would not have fasted for 40 days! Jesus is against fasting for the wrong reasons. Jesus is not against the spiritual disciplines. He's against doing them with the wrong motives.

And that means if you're having a "quiet time" and doing it with the wrong motives, like, *"If I don't do this in the morning, something bad will happen today,"* Jesus does not want that for you because you're not doing it in faith, not doing it because you just want to be with Him, to enjoy Him. As Romans 14:23 says, *"...For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin."* Sometimes we turn prayer and Bible reading into this thing that we believe that either makes Jesus dole out blessings or curses on us. *"If I read my Bible, Jesus will like me. He'll re-tweet me. And if I don't, he won't like my posts on Facebook."* That's not Grace. That's not Jesus. That's not the Gospel.

The Pharisees thought they could earn grace by fasting. They didn't fast because they wanted to obey God's Word, or get to know Him more, or to kill sin in their lives. They did it to look good in the eyes of others and in their own eyes. It had nothing to do with God even though it revolved around God!! It was not done in a humble seeking of God. It wasn't, *"I'm fasting and depriving my body of food to demonstrate and remind myself just how desperate I am. I am going without food, which I desperately need, in order to remind myself that I desperately need God 10,000x more."* It wasn't that at all. It was all a show.

But that's why you fast. You fast to remind yourself that your soul has a hunger that is deeper and stronger than your desire for food. You fast to be reminded of something that you and I always and continually forget: that we desperately need Jesus! That we need Him more than food! Fasting is saying to Jesus, *"This is how desperate I am. I want you. I need you more than food, Jesus!"*

But that's not why the Pharisees did it. They did it to feel good about themselves and then in return look down on others. They were using this beautiful, albeit tough, spiritual discipline, designed and given by God, not to humbly draw near to Yahweh, but to promote and inflate their own egos! As their stomach shrunk from lack of food, their egos got bigger. As their stomach growled from being hungry, their own P.R. got louder. It was all: Self-righteousness. Self-reliance. Pride. To feel good about yourself.

And in Matthew's gospel, he records Jesus condemning the Pharisees:

*"And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."* Matthew 6:16-18

Here's what Jesus is saying to us today-

**FOCUS ON YOUR SAVIOR, NOT ON YOUR BEHAVIOR.**

Don't obsess over what you do or don't do. Focus on Jesus. Enjoy the Lord. Enjoy His presence. Enjoy communion with Him. Celebrate. Laugh. Dance. Sing. Focus on what Jesus has already done for you through His life, death, and resurrection.

The Pharisees took a God thing, fasting, and turned it into a "look at me everybody" thing. And I had a roommate in college do this. It started one morning at 6 A.M. I heard the click of the lamp and then a small light filled the room. I looked down from the top bunk and saw my roommate reading his Bible and praying at his desk. Then I went back to sleep. The next day the same thing happened. And then the next day. And the next day he told me that his parents were coming into town, and it hit me: *He's doing his "quiet times" because his parents will ask him how his "quiet times" are going and he wants to be able to say, 'They're going well, Mom. I get up at 6 and read my Bible and pray.'*

And that's exactly why he was doing it! I asked him straight up, *"Have you've been getting up at 6 and having a 'quiet time' so that when your parents ask if you've been having your 'quiet times,' you can say, 'Yes.?'"* And he sheepishly admitted to it! I give him credit for that. He came clean.

That's not what Jesus wants. He doesn't want your performance. He doesn't want you obsessing over your performance. He wants you to rest in His finished work. He wants you to enjoy Him. Read your Bible? Yes. Pray? Yes. Fast? Yes. And if you struggle to do these things- *like we all do-* just be honest with Jesus. Tell Him, *"I really don't want to read the Bible right now, but I know I need it. Please help me. Change my heart. Help, Lord."* Be honest with Jesus. He can handle it. And He already knows!

But don't do the spiritual disciplines to be seen by others. Don't do it thinking you get extra points with God. And don't do it to inflate your spiritual ego. Do it because you love Jesus and you want to be with Him and get to know Him better. Do it because you want to enjoy the Lord.

## FOCUS ON YOUR SAVIOR, NOT ON YOUR BEHAVIOR.

What we end up doing is we replace the Gospel with our own versions of the Gospel. We craft our own versions of "good news." Rules. Laws. Just like the Pharisees did.

We do this by coming up with our own versions of "things" we must "do." For instance, even reading the Bible can become a Pharisee-like rule. Now, we should all be reading our Bibles, correct? Yes. It's God's Word. It's life. It's truth. This book is God's voice to us. You wanna hear God speak to you? Read this book. You want to hear the audible voice of God? Read this book out loud. Do you want to hear God speak to you? Read your Bible. And just so that I don't get any emails, hear me again: You need to read your Bible. Or, listen to an audio version. You need God's word.

But what we sometimes do is think that *because we read it or because we don't read it*, then something happens. If we read the Bible, if we have a quiet time, then we think God will bless us more. And if we don't have a quiet time in the morning, then we will probably lose our job that day. Or, get the flu. Or, be responsible for some earthquake that hits our state.

When we think that way we demonstrate that we don't understand grace. The following list is taken from Jerry Bridges' book, *Transforming Grace: Living Confidently in God's Unfailing Love*. If any of these resonate with you, it's a sign that you don't understand grace. You know you don't understand God's grace when you-

\* *Live with a vague sense of God's disapproval.* You think that God is frowning at you. You think He is a grumpy dad. You think He's always mad and let down. You don't understand grace.

\* *Feel sheepish bringing your needs before Him when you've just failed Him.* You just blew it. You just did that sin that you've repented of 10,000x and you think that you can't go to Him. You don't understand grace.

\* *Feel you deserve an answer to prayer because of your hard work and sacrifice.* Oh, you get up and pray for 2 hours. You read Leviticus in one sitting. You serve at church. You do so much for Him, so He owes you! You don't understand grace.

\* *Assume that you've sinned so many times that you've used up all your credit of forgiveness.* You've sinned "your sin"- you know, the one that you are good at. And you've done it over and over and over. There's no way that God can forgive you. You've used up all credit. You don't understand grace.

\* *Feel more confident before God if you've been "faithful" with your quiet times, prayer, witnessing, etc.* Oh, you get a "speed pass" right to God, not because of Jesus' performance, but because of yours. You don't understand grace. You're just a glory thief.

\* *Can't honestly say that you see yourself as "blameless" in His eyes.* You feel dirty. You feel like you have the mange. You feel like when God looks at you He sees a dirty, filthy, no good sinner. You don't understand grace.

\* *Fear that the day may not go as well as expected because you missed your quiet time.* You over sleep. You don't have time to pray and read the Word of God and now your whole day is going to be ruined. All because of what you didn't do. You don't understand grace.

\* *Assume you can do something to make Him love you more or less.* You think that you can do things and He'll love you more. And if you mess up, then His love for you begins to diminish. You don't understand grace.

Grace and religion are not compatible. Grace and the Pharisees' man-made rules were not compatible. And Jesus ends by giving two short parables explaining to these people how *He is not compatible* with all of these traditions of the Pharisees.

LOOK AT VERSE 21...

*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."*

Here's what Jesus is saying. He is the new patch, the new wine. He can't be added to the tradition of the Pharisees, which is exactly why they want to kill Him in chapter 3! He's not playing by their man-made rules and they don't like it! So they start having meetings about how they can kill Him.

And by saying that He is the new patch and the new wine, Jesus is posing a question to those who questioned Him: *"Are you going to stay with business as usual the Pharisees way, or, are you going to join the wedding celebration? Will you receive the new wine of the Gospel or stay with man-made systems?"*

You can't put Jesus into the Pharisee's religion. He's not compatible with their system of self-righteousness, with their "do more" and "try harder" religion.

If you try to add the Gospel to a system of human effort, human works, etc it will destroy the Gospel and therefore it won't be the Gospel anymore. The Pharisees had a gospel of works. But our hope must be in Christ and Christ alone. Not what we do for Him, but what he has done for us. Not what we do for Him, but what he has already done for us.

Jesus is telling us that He has invited us to a dance. He has invited us to a wedding celebration. In fact, for Jesus, every day is his wedding day. That's what Puritan John Owen said-

*"His heart is glad in us, without sorrow. And every day while we live is his wedding day... The thoughts of communion with the saints were the joy of his heart from eternity."* (Communion with the Triune God, p.233)

His heart is glad in us, Grace! He's not disappointed with us! He's glad in us! Every day is His wedding day! For all of eternity, there has been one all-consuming thought of God's: to have communion with us. We were the joy of His heart from all eternity! Let that sink in.

Now, which do you really want? To be a self-absorbed Pharisee? Hearing your own voice brag about you or hearing Jesus say over you, *"You are mine. You are Beloved. Everyday is my wedding day with you"*?

The Pharisees were relying on their work, not God's. Are you relying on what you do for God to have significance, or on what Jesus has done for you? Why march in place when you can dance? Why fast on Super Bowl Sunday? Why go to a wedding and sit in the corner? Get out on the dance floor! Do you wanna march in place or party? March or dance? I wanna party. I wanna dance. I wanna enjoy the Lord.

Not that we ignore sin. Not that we ignore suffering. But Christianity is not all about eating liver and drinking prune juice! If you look at some people, their idea of being a disciple is eating liver and drinking prune juice. No! Jesus is telling us here that we are a party people! We are a laughing people! We are a dancing people!

The Pharisees were all about religion. And religion says, *"I have it all together and no one else does."* Religion makes you judgmental. Religion puffs you up and tears other people down. Religion tattle-tales. Religion makes you a bad kid. And grace comes along and changes all of that. Jesus is telling us here that He is the new patch, the new wine, and He is not compatible with religion. Jesus is telling us here that we need to clear our medicine cabinets of religion pills and flush them down the toilet. That's what Robert Capon actually said. He said-

*I think good preachers should be like bad kids. They ought to be naughty enough to tiptoe up on dozing congregations, steal their bottles of religion pills...and flush them all down the drain. The church, by and large, has drugged itself into thinking that proper human behavior is the key to its relationship with God. What preachers need to do is force it to go cold turkey with nothing but the word of the cross--and then be brave enough to stick around while [the congregation] goes through the inevitable withdrawal symptoms.*

Let's flush our religion pills down the toilet and go cold turkey with nothing but the word of the cross. Let's

### **FOCUS ON OUR SAVIOR, NOT ON OUR BEHAVIOR.**

And let's listen to His voice. Hear His audible voice to you, today, right now-

*"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."* Matthew 11:28-30

---

"When Jesus Steals Your Bottle of Religion Pills and Flushes Them Down the Toilet"

Mark 2:18-22

Sermon Study Questions

1. Discuss this list from Jerry Bridges:

You know you don't understand God's grace when you-

- \* *Live with a vague sense of God's disapproval.*
- \* *Feel sheepish bringing your needs before Him when you've just failed Him.*
- \* *Feel you deserve an answer to prayer because of your hard work and sacrifice.*
- \* *Assume that you've sinned so many times that you've used up all your credit of forgiveness.*
- \* *Feel more confident before God if you've been "faithful" with your quiet times, prayer, witnessing, etc.*
- \* *Can't honestly say that you see yourself as "blameless" in His eyes.*
- \* *Fear that the day may not go as well as expected because you missed your quiet time.*
- \* *Assume you can do something to make Him love you more or less.*

Do any of these resonate with you?

2. How do you typically think of Christianity? As a dance or a march of soldiers?