



THE GOSPEL OF MARK

Study Guide Full
Mark 2:13-22
August 4, 2019

As we move from the passage of Jesus' healing and forgiving the paralytic to that of Jesus' dining with Levi, with Levi's fellow tax collectors, and with other sinners, we see the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees intensifying, particularly with regards to the kinds of people that Jesus draws to himself as he teaches authoritatively regarding the kingdom of God and regarding his own ministry.

In fact, not only do the Pharisees disagree with the make-up of these multitudes, but with the general nature of the kingdom—one proclaiming, "Eat, Drink, and Be Merry."

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."

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."

Mark 2:13-22

Notes:



Jesus Eats With Sinners
French Painter
F. Alexandre Bida
(1813-1895)
(earlychurchhistory.org)

Commentary Notes:

vv. 13-17. The call of Levi begins with another mention of the large crowds following Jesus, the kind of sizeable crowds that we have just seen in the healing and forgiveness of the paralytic. In fact, it is the multitudes, and the make-up of these multitude, that is going to bring Jesus into hightening conflict with the Pharisees and the scribes, the teachers

Discussion Questions:

Discuss: What are our rules and regulations, written or unwritten, of table fellowship in 21st century Vancouver? With whom are we "supposed" to dine?

of the law.

As regards contextual background: the tax toll booths were situated on the roads of travelers and merchants, collecting taxes on the transport of goods. More significant yet is an understanding of tax collectors in biblical times. They had a reputation of contempt, distrusted and despised for often keeping excess tax revenues for themselves, and for generally collecting taxes on a highest-bidder basis: ruling authorities, such as Herod, would farm out the collection of tolls to the highest bidder, who could charge as much as he was able to extract (see Voelz's commentary, 203). No wonder Jews despised these agents of non-Jewish rule, especially as they frequently interacted with Gentiles.

But it is precisely such a man as Levi whose house Jesus enters for a meal, radically redefining the boundaries of table fellowship. Here, the Greek word for eating *συνανάκειμαι* (*synanakeinto*) actually means to recline at a table together with others. Indeed, it is well translated as "eating," for such reclining was the custom at larger meals in the biblical world. And yet, the image of reclining certainly provides additional emphasis that this is an unhurried meal of true presence.

Want one more piece of lexical food for thought? What does "Pharisee" mean? You might venture a close guess from your previous biblical reading: "Pharisee" derives from the Hebrew verb *פָּרַשׁ* (*parash*), meaning "to separate." Oh, the irony!

Discuss: Who are the "tax collectors" of modern society? Who carries the burden of a reputation of contempt (see commentary note here)?

Discern: Who are the "tax collectors and sinners" whom God has put in your life? Can you name a few individuals? What are the spiritual practices in your life that remind you to "dine" with such folks?

Confess: How have you identified with the Pharisees this week, unaware of your own your own illness, be it emotional, spiritual, relational, etc.? Confess to one another, and receive anew the promise of his healing.

Meditate: In what way is Jesus challenging this week your worldview regarding who "should" be included at the table?

Pray: The church Father Augustine, in *Letter 145* on these verses, writes regarding being made healthy by the healing of Christ: "Pray for us that we may be made upright. This is indeed something which one cannot do unless he knows and wishes it; and he will become so as constantly as he wishes it fully—but not through his own effort, only as he is healed and helped by the grace of the Spirit." May the Spirit make Augustine's words our own words as continually seek God's healing in our lives.

vv. 18-22. Jesus' conflict with the Pharisees continues to heighten, as the Pharisees now question why Jesus's disciples do not fast. Clearly, John's followers have been stressing the Mark 1 teaching of a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, in light of the fact that throughout the Old Testament (as in Leviticus 23 and Daniel 9, to name just a few examples), fasting was regularly practiced in association with the forgiveness of sins.

Jesus responds with the analogy of the wedding banquet and bridegroom, a concept used or alluded to not only in the New Testament—as in Matthew 25, John 3, and Revelation 19—but also in the Old (as in Jeremiah 7, Jeremiah 33, and Isaiah 62). Jesus, then, is speaking of himself in terms of the final restoration of Jerusalem, when he will dwell with his people; such is the kingdom of God come near in the life and ministry of Jesus.

Reflect: The imagery of this passage, of Christ as bridegroom, implies communal joy in the presence of Jesus, and provides a picture of the “kingdom of God come near.” How is His presence speaking good news of joy/celebration to you today?

Study: In what ways do you think Jesus is referring to his life and ministry as a new thing? How might this be related to Old Testament references to the “bridegroom,” as in Isaiah 62 and Jeremiah 33? Look up those references now.

Discuss: How do we find a balance in the Christian life between times of fasting and repentance, and times of banqueting? What approaches have you found helpful in the past? What did Anthony preach in this regard?

Discern: What are the “new things” that God is doing in your neighbourhood? Do you have enough of a connection to your place of living/place of Connection Group gathering, to have a true sense as to how God is moving in that place? If not, how can you get to know better your neighbourhood? If your group draws from multiple regions, what might it look like to speak God's good news of boundary-breaking banqueting to *one* specific location in the Vancouver area?

Discern: How might God be speaking a word of “new gospel expressions do not fit old widescins” in terms of our corporate church life? Are there areas of our church life/ministries that might need to die? *Graciously* discuss this concept together.

Pray: Pray for our currently forming FBC team that will serve our First Nations friends at Onion Lake this summer, as well as for our hoped-for sponsoring of a refugee family. Note that these ministries give key expressions to the truth that Jesus is a God of boundary-breaking banqueting.