

Meet Jesus: As he scorns religion

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[0 : 00] Amen. Well, we've had a little series on the beginning of Mark's Gospel, so if you'd just like to turn that up in the Bibles, we're on page 837.

And I'll begin reading at chapter 2, verse 18. Page 837. 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 onto an old garment. If he does, the pouch tears away from it. The new from the old, and the worst 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.

[1 : 17] One Sabbath he was going through the grain fields. And as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. And the Pharisees were saying to him, Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?

And 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 Abathah, the high priest, and ate the bread of presents, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave some to those who were with him.

And 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 on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. And he said to the man with a 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. And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart. And he said to them, Stretch out your hand, he said to the man. He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.

[2 : 34] The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him. Well, we're going to begin with a recap on our series.

So if you've missed all the previous three weeks, that's great. We'll have a recap now, and you'll be up to speed. For those that have been here, you might remember chapter 1 and verse 1.

Mark, up front, he tells us that Jesus is the Christ. That is, the long-anticipated one from the Old Testament. The Jewish word is Messiah, isn't it?

And so, Jesus, he doesn't arrive in a vacuum. No, he comes in fulfilment of Old Testament promises. And he sort of arrives in an atmosphere of anticipation.

In just the third verse, Mark is quoting Isaiah, prepare the way of the Lord. Yes, there was eager expectation. All the Bible had been waiting for this point.

[3 : 38] God's people, they'd have a desperate thirst for their Messiah. You know, every time they heard that armour clanking on the Roman soldiers.

I imagine they wanted to run to the synagogue, get a scroll out, and try and pluck their Messiah out of the scroll. I guess there was a lot of anticipation. Maybe it was a bit like the 1960s.

You know, a railway station when the Beatles were arriving. You know the scene, you've perhaps seen it on TV. The excitement, the trouble was, well, the Jews, they'd been waiting over 400 years.

It was 400 years since the last prophecy. And then he arrives, doesn't he? Jesus arrives in the Jordan. And chapter 1, verse 11, the Father confirms the identity of his Son. Yes, it's the incarnation. And Jesus begins his ministry. You might remember that verse. Chapter 1, verse 15. Jesus calling his kingdom to himself.

[4 : 44] He says, the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the gospel. So the king's arrived, hasn't he? But what sort of expectation do God's people have here?

You know, they were expecting the Messiah, but, well, what was the shape of that expectation? And will Jesus fit like a glove?

In fact, is that the wrong way around completely? If Jesus is the fullest revelation of God, shouldn't, think about this, shouldn't their expectations be moulded to him?

Isn't that the way around it should be? Do you see the sort of tension here as Jesus arrives? Before I was a Christian, I had a blind date once in Derby.

And I turned up at the appointed time in the right place. It was outside McDonald's on Cathedral Street. And I was waiting and waiting and she never turned up.

[5 : 48] So, don't feel too sorry for me. I'll tell you the rest of it now. She didn't turn up. So I walked across the road and I went to a shop.

I think it was called Topman. And I was looking at shirts in Topman. And I looked out the window and there she was outside McDonald's. And to my shame, I stopped in Topman for another 20 minutes looking at shirts.

So I never actually met her. And the Jews have a template for Jesus, don't they? And the question is, is it malleable? Will God's fullest revelation of his son kick into touch all these erroneous expectations?

And this is the tension in the first century Jewish world. Here's a few areas of conflict. The first area that we looked at is the kingdom era.

And that was our second talk. Yes, it's the incarnation. But where does it fit in in God's unfolding plan of salvation? And our second talk was controlled by chapter 1, verse 38.

[6 : 57] Jesus is asserting his priority, not of miracles, which we might expect, but of teaching. The crowds want the former and friends, we want the former.

Who wouldn't want their mum and dad healed when they're suffering? Or an illness cured? So they come up to Jesus, don't they? Chapter 1, verse 37.

And they found him and said to him, everyone is looking for you. But Jesus doesn't satisfy the expectations of the crowd. He doesn't fit their mould, does he?

You see, think about this. Sadly, all those people that Jesus healed, well, they all died again, didn't they? They all died, sadly, eventually.

And if Jesus was to concentrate on a ministry of healing, just think about it. It would be like trying to keep about, well, hundreds of plates spinning in the air, wouldn't it? We'd run him from one, doing a miracle here, there, just think if it was us, 150 of us, and he had to keep us all in good health.

[8 : 01] He'd be running from one to the other. We'd be phoning him up. He'd be all over the place trying to do it. But Jesus doesn't satisfy that expectation of the crowd. His primary ministry, his primary ministry, is not patching up this world, but bringing in another.

And so today, think about this. When we hear the clank of Roman armour, or its equivalent, whatever that might be, we have to remember which era we're in.

When we have a difficult diagnosis, an illness, when everything seems to go wrong in our lives. If you're anything like me, that just happens. It's not that we can't pray for our God to lovingly intervene and help with his care and provision.

It's not that. But what's our priority? Is it instant miracles, or is it a message? This world, or the world to come?

In chapter 1 and verse 38, Jesus tells us about his priority. Do you remember that? Let's go on to the next town, as thou may preach there also.

[9 : 15] For that is why I came out. So Jesus confronted this erroneous expectation about the era of his incarnation. And then it was about his people.

And this was our talk last week. You might remember that the religious people, they thought that the kingdom of God belonged to people like them.

And Jesus seems to be doing the opposite, doesn't he? He's walking around, welcoming people who seem to be on the outside. Tax collectors, sinners, a paralytic, a leper.

And chapter 2, verse 17, was a controlling statement. Do you remember that? Look, chapter 2, verse 17. And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.

Okay? Not to call the righteous, but sinners. And so that was sort of another messianic correction in the early ministry of Jesus.

[10:14] Now today, our passage, the correction is with regard to, not the era of Jesus' kingdom, not the citizens of Jesus' kingdom, but the law of his kingdom.

How are the people of God to live? And our first point is romantic joy or mechanical ritual. And it's chapter 2, from verses 18 to 22.

The Pharisees, well, they thought they knew how to fast. Not once a year, as prescribed in the Old Testament, but twice a week. You might remember in Luke's Gospel, chapter 18, one Pharisee says, I fast twice a week, and I give a tenth of all I earn.

And they say to Jesus, verse 18, Why are your disciples fasting? Do you see that? Verse 19, 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. Jesus is saying, Can't you see? It's me. I'm here. You're Messiah right now. And so, fasting is incongruous in such a situation.

[11:32] Friends, I guess we've all had times, haven't we, in life, when we've been unable to eat. You know, some sort of trauma, a bereavement, anxiety, ill health.

Are you with me, friends? Or it's our sinfulness, a broken relationship, a major issue in life that we need to confront. In the Bible, fasting expresses something real.

It's not an artificial religious thing. But the Pharisees had made it into a work. You fasted like clockwork, regardless of your emotions.

And so, really, think about this. It was telling a lie, wasn't it? It was telling a lie. In a way. Like the false smiles and platitudes you sometimes come across in life.

You know what I'm talking about. And so, Jesus is saying here, Get real. The king was with them. The promised blessings are breaking in. A time of joy.

[12:34] And it's not a time of incessant fasting. Jesus says, The bridegroom is here. You know, the Messiah you've been waiting for. And then, verses 21 and 22.

I think these verses sort of sum up the whole passage. Right up even to chapter 3, verse 6. You know, sort of imagine Jesus coming into view. And he's got a microphone.

He's like a reporter. And he's giving us interpretive information here of what's going on. Just look there at chapter 2 from verse 21. Jesus there.

Imagine him with a microphone. And he's just giving us the interpretation of this. He says, No one sows a piece of unshrunk cloth onto an old garment. If he does, the patch tears away from it.

The new from the old. And the worst tear is made. And no one puts new wine into old white skins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins. And the wine is destroyed. And so are the skins.

[13:30] But new wine is for fresh wine skins, says Jesus. What he's saying, He's saying there's a major incompatibility here. You can't tag me onto your religion.

That's what he's saying. This is the new age of the Messiah. Don Carson says this. Listen, this is a quote. The old does not support the new.

It points to it, prepares for it, and then gives way to it. I hope I'm explaining this properly. I hope it's making sense. So as Christians, being reconciled to God, and being reconciled to each other, well think about this.

Our lives in general should be lives of joy, shouldn't they? In general. Our next point. Is Jesus fulfills the law from verses 23 to 28.

So the new can't adopt the old. There's incompatibility, says Jesus. But the Pharisees, well they just love their religion.

[14:37] They love their religion and all the status it brings. And they're not about to repent. No, no, no. And their great litmus test is the Sabbath law.

Rabbis, they've drawn up a code of 39 prohibitions on the Sabbath day. 39 works that you were prohibited to conduct.

And then they were all subdivided into little minutiae, so that you couldn't accidentally or unknowingly transgress the Sabbath law. You know, if the Pharisees were traffic wardens in Glasgow, just imagine what that would be like.

Have you ever seen a car with the alarm going and the lights flashing on top of one of these trucks? If the Pharisees were traffic wardens, I imagine West George Street would be completely blocked solid, with log jammed, with trucks and vehicles on the top, lights flashing. You know, and we hear a motorist, he says, all I did was let a passenger out of my car and the crane just picked it up and went. It was gone. In the first century, it's heads of grain that are the focus.

[15:44] Look there at verse 23 over the page. Page 838. Page 838. Page 23 at the top. One Sabbath, he was going through the grain fields and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain.

How small that is. And the Pharisees were saying to him, look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath? Do you see that? They're plucking just heads of grain.

And the legal experts, the jury, us, the public, we all hold our breath for a moment. We're wondering what's going to go on here.

And then verse 25, a brilliant legal mind. He presents a shocking precedent before the court. Look there at verse 25.

Do you see what Jesus says? And he said to them, have you never read what David did? Don't you know your Bibles, you clergy? That's what he's saying. Have you never read what David did when he was in need, when he was hungry, hearing those who were with him, how he entered the house of God in the time of Abathur, the high priest, and ate the bread of the presence, which is not lawful for any but the priest to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him.

[17:04] David, his troops were exhausted and famished. And so the priest laid aside the ceremonial law because of people's needs.

They were more important than legalism. So Jesus isn't abandoning the law here. No, he's looking behind the law at the principles of it and fulfilling the law.

And verse 27, what a statement that is, isn't it? The Sabbath was made for man. It serves man. It's not the other way around. The Sabbath was made for man.

Friends, the Sabbath is a foretaste. This is big picture stuff. Hebrews chapter 4. The Sabbath is a foretaste of the new creation. It's amazing. And so once a week, it's pointing to a greater rest.

A rest that will one day be with God for all of eternity. And we get a little picture of that each week through the Sabbath day. Heads of grain or the Son of Man.

[18:11] Where do we place our trust? I'll just read this to you. It's from a more theological college in Australia. You might need to take a deep breath to get some oxygen going around.

I'll read it slowly. I think it's based on Hebrews chapter 4. The Sabbath is to provide a rest for people and to remind them of the eternal rest which God has prepared for them in the age to come.

The weekly Sabbath is a reminder of the heavenly Sabbath. As the Son of Man, Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath, which is the age to come.

The Pharisees disputed use of the sign, but they do not see that he is the Lord of the reality to which the sign pointed.

The thing to remember is that Jesus is God's fullest revelation. So when we want interpretation of Scripture, we go to him.

[19:13] He's the fullest revelation of God. Chapter 1 of Hebrews, verses 1 and 2. So it's a relationship. Not a list of rules. A person. And that's how he saves you, friend, if you're a Christian today.

If you're following him, he's a person. And think about this. He's a person. So your sin fitted him perfectly. His obedience here becomes yours.

It fits you. It fits you well, says God, Romans chapter 8. And so Jesus is law, obedience and fulfillment in human form.

Think about this. Day 7 has arrived on earth. Human shaped. He can woo us because he's human like us. His spirit finds its home in our hearts because it's sent to us by the incarnate Son.

The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath, says Jesus. And our final point, the Pharisees reject Jesus. Chapter 3 and verses 1 to 6.

[20:21] So what's the response of the religious? Will they mold themselves to their Messiah? No. They turn the Sabbath into an instrument of death. They set a trap.

It's a manipulation of the law. In other words, they, the Pharisees, think that they're the lords of the Sabbath. And I think it's almost funny. Chapter 3, verses 1 to 6.

Because they sort of, if you read it, they remain anonymous. The Pharisees. They watch Jesus, verse 2. To see whether he would heal on the Sabbath. So that they might accuse him.

Mark doesn't give us the identity of the people who are watching. And then look at verse 6. Do you see verse 6? The Pharisees, it's like they sort of jump out of the undergrowth with a rifle.

It suddenly gives us their identity there in verse 6. And that's what's going on there in that little passage. But look what the devil has done.

[21 : 17] Look what the devil has done, friend. Look at the end of verse 4. Do you see that? Do you see the Pharisees when Jesus questions them? But they were silent. Why are they like that?

The logic is, well, you no longer need to go to a Pharisee for the interpretation of the law. And so their egos are threatened. That new cloth is tearing away from the old.

And they were silent. Made in the image of a speaking God. They hear his word, but they sort of dehumanize themselves. Jesus is giving sight to the blind.

The lame walk. The blind see. The deaf hear. Lepers are cleansed. And the Pharisees choose to be mute. Like they're dead. Little wonder at Jesus' reaction.

Do you remember his reaction? Verse 5. He looks around at them. He looks around at the world today. Look what the devil's done. Grieved at their hardness of heart.

[22 : 22] At the end of verse 5. What does Jesus do? He stretches. Stretch out your hand, he says. He stretched it out. And his hand was restored. Surrounded by hatred.

Jesus ministers love. And verse 6. Their reaction. What do they want? They want him dead. They want to destroy the truth. Like much of religion since.

Massacre the saints. Burn the churches. No discussion. Just destruction. And so yes. Chapter 15. They have their way, don't they?

Jesus is crucified. And brothers and sisters. Those of us who follow this king. We look ahead to a Sabbath rest.

That will be rest for all of eternity. Where we meet the Lord of the Sabbath. Face to face. The Son of Man. He awaits his bride. Isn't that remarkable?

[23 : 19] Us. Us. The church. Shall we pray? Dear Heavenly Father. Father we once again thank you. For sending your Son into this world.

And how it is the logic of you. And how all things fit together in your Son. We pray that you'd dwell in us powerfully through him.

And you'd continue to transform our lives. And form us to his shape. So that we can radiate him into this world. And draw other people to yourself. So I pray that you'd go with us now.

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. And the love of God. And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Be with us all. Now this day and forevermore. Amen.