



## Love Him or Hate Him

Mark 2.18-3.6

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About 10 years ago, I was visiting a church in south eastern Turkey. We were doing some work on their building in the hot Turkish sun, which meant we went through gallons and gallons of water. And the guys I was with took it in turns to go and buy big jugs of water from the shop up the street. But when it was my turn, I got to the shop and the owner said he was out. We had already bought all of it!

So he pointed up the street to show me that if I went outside the ancient walls to the newer part of the city, there was another shop there. And as I got closer and closer to the city gate I heard the noise of a large crowd get louder and louder. And when I got to the gate and looked out at the other side, I saw a massive crowd of protesters on one side of the street and the police lined up on the other. And directly through the no-man's land in the middle was the shop where I could buy water.

Now, I don't really know how dangerous this situation was, but at a minimum it was an uncomfortable situation. An angry crowd on the right, the police in full riot gear on the left and just days before these same protesters, as part of their protest, had completely demolished the bus of a visiting football team by throwing large rocks at it as it drove out of town.

And here I was, an obvious outsider—looking about as American as I possibly can, with a decision to make. I felt a real sense of threat that day, a real sense of danger as I faced this decision. Do I walk through no-man's land to get the water, or do I turn back?

Well, This is sort of how this week's passage ends...with some real danger.

Today's passage concludes with these words...

text: Mark 3.6 - Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.

Today's passage ends with two groups of people getting together planning to kill Jesus.

And by the way, these two groups aren't friends. They're actually enemies...

It's a classic case of the enemy of my enemy is my friend.

Here's what this will reveal to us. Remember our three groups? There's three groups that Jesus tends to interact with. There's the Crowds who are Captivated, the Followers who Follow and the Opposition who Oppose.

No one who meets Jesus in the Gospel of Mark is indifferent to him. They're either so captivated they come en mass to see him, or they love him so deeply they leave everything to follow him, or they hate him so much, eventually they plot to kill him.

Here's what I want you to consider as we walk through this passage today. Not "am I part of the captivated crowd, or am I a loving follower, or even am I part of the opposition?" I want you to think about whether or not you're indifferent to him. Because if you're indifferent, it's possible you haven't considered him deeply enough to have truly met him.

You see, everyone who meets Jesus in Mark walks away captivated, or willing to follow him with their whole lives, or wanting him dead.

Well, as we've seen, today's passage ends with a murder plot. But that's not where it starts. It starts right where we left off last week...at a feast.

### 1. Threat Level One - 2.18-22

Remember last week? Jesus was at Levi's house having a feast with Levi and all his friends.

In even accepting the invitation to Levi's house, Jesus has broken the rules of religion by defiling himself with sinners, but it gets worse because it seems on this day that Jesus was feasting with Levi and his friends...he should be fasting.

So, picture Jesus and his followers sitting around the table with Levi and all his sinner friends. And gathered around looking in on the feast are the opposition—the Pharisees—filled with anger, looking in at this spectacle...Let's pick up the story again in verse 18...

text: Mark 2.18 - 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?"

Do you see this? On the day when all godly people—like the Pharisees and John's disciples—are fasting...Jesus and his followers are feasting.

Why would Jesus do that? He gives us two pictures to answer the question, take a look at the first one, verse 19...

### A. Wedding

text: Mark 2.19 - 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.

The first picture is of a wedding. And even though our weddings look different than a first century Hebrew wedding, we can get the idea—no one fasts at a wedding. A wedding is a time of celebration a time for feasting not fasting.

So the first reason Jesus and his disciples aren't fasting is because Jesus has come! The Son of God is here, that's a time of rejoicing, a time of celebration. Just as you don't fast at a wedding, you don't fast when Jesus the true bridegroom has come.

Now, there will come a time, Jesus says in verse 20, when his followers will fast, but not right now. Right now, he's with them—God the Son, Jesus Christ the author with all authority in heaven and earth has come—now is a time of fasting not feasting.

So, that's the first reason, here's the second. Take a look at verse 21...

### B. Wineskins

text: Mark 2.21-22 - **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."

Both of these images illustrate the same thing, so let's focus on the wineskins.

Now, I don't know about you, but I don't keep my wine in wineskins. I keep mine in bottles. And that's not a problem because all the wine I buy is old wine. That's not a brag. All the wine you buy at Tesco is old wine too.

A couple of years ago I was visiting some friends in the Czech Republic on one of our summer missions. And the friend who was hosting us invited me to the garden of his apartment building where some of his neighbours had gathered for an annual tradition. Once a year his neighbour would travel to a local winery and buy, not old wine, but new wine. New wine is wine that is still fermenting.

You see, there's a time in the wine making process when the wine is just beginning the fermentation process and it's incredibly sweet—sweet like candy. Not only is it sweet, but it's incredibly fizzy—like you're drinking soda. And once a year my friend's neighbour would go and buy a bunch of bottles of new wine for him and his neighbours to enjoy and I just happened to be there on this special weekend.

Now, here's the interesting thing about this new wine, you can't buy too much of it; because, firstly, it's only sweet for a couple of days, then it goes really bitter as the fermentation process continues.

But not only that, while you have the new wine, you can't leave your house, or if you do, you have to bring the new wine with you. Its fermenting process creates so much pressure inside the bottle that if you don't release it every couple of hours, the bottle could explode.

So, when Jesus says you can't put new wine into old wineskins he's thinking about this new wine that is expanding—that needs room to grow.

Now, it might sound strange, or even disgusting to pour wine into the skins of a goat, but that's what they did in the ancient world. And you would always pour new wine into freshly tanned and prepared goatskins. Their natural elasticity and strength would allow the fermenting new wine to expand and grow.

But on the other hand, if you poured new—expanding—wine into an old tired wineskins their tired old brittle inflexible condition would cause them to burst and both the wine and wineskin would be lost.

Here's the second reason Jesus and his followers aren't fasting. It's because the kind of life that Jesus came to bring is a new and expanding life.

You see, when Jesus Christ gives us his life—it's an expanding life. The life that Jesus gives fills us with more joy, more love, more hope, more mercy, more forgiveness. So much so, that the old container of religion can't contain it.

That's what Jesus is showing the Pharisees here. The old contracting container of religion that does nothing more than put limits on people's lives is being done away with. And the new expanding, swelling, growing life that Jesus brings, has come.

Have you ever noticed this in the life of someone who's become a Christian? The more they are filled with the life that Jesus gives the more merciful they are? Did you ever notice how their old prejudices go away? Have you seen how their friendships and relationships blossom?

With these two pictures Jesus says: "Religion can't contain me or the life I bring."

Being with Jesus is like being at a wedding. Being with Jesus means your life grows and expands rather than shrinks and contracts.

Do you see why you can't be indifferent to him?

The way Mark strings these three stories together is intentional. This first one about the expanding, swelling, filling, joy-giving life that Jesus brings sets up the other two stories. The next two stories of opposition are all about the religious leaders working hard to cram people's lives into the contracting container of religion, and in both of them Jesus comes into kick out the walls of the containers and give his followers an expanding, joy-filled life.

Both of the next two stories fill in for us how Jesus expands our lives. First, we'll see that Jesus' expanding life is filling, then we'll see it's restoring.

So, let's take a look at the next story. Now we're at Threat Level Two.

## 2. Threat Level Two - 2.23-28

As we get to Threat Level Two, we find Jesus and his closest followers traveling and hungry.

It's not unlike how my friends and I felt that day in Turkey. We were quickly feeling dehydrated as we worked all day in the hot Turkish sun and we needed water. So here I was with a decision to make. Do I risk my safety for some water, or do I turn back empty handed?

Well, I went for it, for not other reason than I was extremely thirsty. My and my friends' desire for water far outweighed my fear.

And that is kind of what is happening on this Sabbath day with Jesus and his friends. They're hungry and their hunger causes them to do something surprising. Take a look at verse 23.

text: Mark 2.23-24 - **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?"

But on this day it is the Sabbath, and the contracting container of religion says, you can't do any work on the Sabbath. And here we have Jesus and his followers on the Sabbath hungry and doing what would be considered "work".

The Old Testament Law commanded that you had to rest from your work one day in seven. And of course, that's a wonderful gift from God!

But by the time Jesus came along, the religious leaders had contracted the container of religion so much that they had come up with 39 types of activity—beyond whatever your normal work was—that you could not do on the Sabbath, including picking grain.

Now, notice, the opposition have stepped up their game here to threat level two. In the last episode, the opposition are annoyed Jesus isn't doing what the in-crowd of religious people are doing. Now, notice their question: "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?"

The accusation is that he's a law-breaker. But notice Jesus' response, he tells a little story...

text: Mark 2.25-26 - **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."

A story about King David and his companions. One day they were hungry and desperate for food. So, here's the image—David's friends are empty, their stomachs are empty and need filling.

But these friends aren't friends of just anyone, they're friends of the king. And what does the king do? Look at verse 26..."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."

David is the God anointed king. Which means he has the authority to eat the consecrated bread along with the priests. And what does David do with his authority? He uses it to fill up his friends need. He fills their stomachs.

This little story is a great picture of someone with authority using their authority to expand the lives of those around him. That's the picture Jesus is painting in his response. Of an anointed king using his authority to bless and fill up the lives of his companions.

Now, notice what Jesus says next in verse 27. As Jesus faces this threat from the opposition he says...

text: Mark 2.27-28 - **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."

It's amazing how Jesus responds to these religious leaders who want to fit everything into the contracting container of religion. Jesus doesn't do away with the Sabbath, he fills it up. He affirms, even celebrates, the original principle of the Sabbath—the need for rest. Yet he squashes the legalism around it. He dismantles the whole religious container. And he does it by pointing to his identity.

He says, "I am the Lord—the king—the one with authority—the Lord of the Sabbath. That word Sabbath means deep rest, deep peace. It's a near synonym of the Hebrew word Shalom which means a state of wholeness or flourishing in every part of life. It describes an expanding and filled up life of joy and peace and harmony.

So, when Jesus says I am the Lord of the Sabbath he means he **IS** the Sabbath. He is the source of deep rest we need. And just like David gave consecrated bread to fulfill his friends' need, Jesus gives us himself to fill our need for true rest.

There's a couple of phenomena going on in our world at the moment. And the first is Experience Collecting.

The thought goes, if I can collect enough amazing and unique experiences, then my life will be full. So rather than settle down somewhere, the thought is to stay lightly attached to a place so that we can move on the moment a new opportunity for experience comes up. Or it's to spend every weekend traveling to a new and exciting place to fill up our instagram story for everyone to see the great experiences we're collecting.

Here's the second, anyone tried bullet journaling? This is where you bullet point every little thing you want to accomplish in a day or a week and you spend your week meticulously recording every little thing you've done. The thinking is, the more bullets you can check off the better your week.

But in the end, both leave you empty, because as soon as you arrive home from a great experience, you're empty again, hungry for another. Or as soon as you finish a day checking off your bullet journal, you're onto planning the next day. So in the end, these two strategies for filling up your life leave you empty.

And that is exactly like what the Pharisees were doing with the Sabbath. This strategy of prohibiting 39 activities in order to ensure you rest, in the end, became exhausting work.

All of these strategies, whether it's filling your Instagram feed with experiences, checking off your bullet journal or abstaining from all 39 types of work on the Sabbath—all of these strategies are means of self-justification. They are ways of justifying our existence. I matter

because of my experiences. I matter because of what I can accomplish.

But here, Jesus says, no you don't. You matter because you're my friend. And as the Lord of the Sabbath—I will fill you up with what you need. I will justify you. So stop from your striving, stop from your self-justification and come to me and I will give you true rest.

Well, another Sabbath rolls around and the threat level takes a step up to Threat Level Three. And we've already seen how the expanding life Jesus brings fills up his followers, and now we'll see how it restores them. Turn over to the next chapter and look with me at verse 1...

### 3. Threat Level Three - 3.1-5

text: Mark 3.1-2 - **1** Another time Jesus went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. **2** Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath.

Here at Threat Level Three, the opposition has set a trap, they're no longer remotely open to Jesus or the kind of life he brings, they're on the lookout to bring him down. If you weren't feeling the tension building before, you're certainly feeling it now.

So, how does Jesus respond? Does he back down? Does he hide away? No, instead he confirms the oppositions worst suspicions. Take a look, verse 3...

text: Mark 3.3 - Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, "Stand up in front of everyone."

Then he turns the tables on them by asking a question, verse 4...

text: Mark 3.4 - Then Jesus asked them, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they remained silent.

And now, the opposition, who up to this point seemed to have words pouring out of their mouths, have nothing to say. Instead, we'll see in a minute, they take a different tactic. But before we see that, I want you to very briefly see what the Lord of the Sabbath—the Lord who gives true rest does on this Sabbath day.

Remember the life Jesus brings to those who follow him is an expanding and filling life, but now notice it's also a life that restores. Take a look at verse 5...

text: Mark 3.5 - He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored.

Here was a man who was longing for the true rest of **restoration**, so he comes to Jesus—the Lord of rest, and on the day of rest, he **restores**. This is what we see Jesus do time and time again in the book of Mark. He uses all his authority to bring true rest.

So, if you're tired. If you're hungry, if you're empty. If you need restoration, why not come to him. Come to Jesus Christ the Lord of the Sabbath—the Lord of Rest and find true rest in him.

Now, you get to verse 6 and all of a sudden it jumps from Threat Level Three to Threat Level 100. The Opposition jump from asking tough questions to a murder plot. Take a look...

### 4. Threat Level 100 - 3.6

text: Mark 3.6 - Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.

Now, we haven't met the Herodians yet. They're new to the story in Mark. They're the supporters of Herod, the nastiest of the corrupt puppet kings who ruled Israel. Herod was the local representative of Rome who had conquered most of the Mediterranean world. And wherever the Romans went, they brought with them Roman culture. Roman philosophy, a Roman approach to life and government and sex and religion and family and culture.

And for the most part, the conquered society felt assaulted by this new way of thinking and way of life. So in most places there would have been a cultural resistance movement trying hard to maintain their own culture. And in Israel the leaders of that cultural resistance was the Pharisees.

But at the same time, there are always those who are more progressive, those who welcome the change in culture. And in Israel the leaders of the cultural change movement were the Herodians.

These two groups could not have been more opposite. Think Labour and Torrey. Think Corbin and Johnson. There is almost nothing they agree on, almost nothing that could bring them together.

But now there is...

They both want to kill Jesus.

Remember at the beginning, we said that no one is indifferent to Jesus. In this case, both the religious and the progressives have such a strong reaction to him they both want him dead. Both are willing to say, the enemy of my enemy is my friend. And so they start to work together...to kill him.

No one is indifferent to him.

So, let's come back to what I asked you to consider at the start. Are you indifferent to Jesus?

Because if you're indifferent to him, it means you must be keeping him at a distance. When Jesus is in your life, he expands it, he fills it, he restores it.

And the truth about Jesus is, He's not indifferent to you...Remember, Jesus is the author of the story. He's entered into the story and he uses all his authority to expand your life, to fill it, to restore you.

And yet he laid down all his authority at the cross. You know this murder plot that the Pharisees and the Herodians came up with. Eventually it worked. They arrested Jesus and they put him on a sham trial and they crucified him.

And as they did that, Jesus could have used all his authority to save himself, he had plenty of opportunities, yet he doesn't do that. Why?

Because he's not indifferent to you. One author in the Bible said it this way...

text: Hebrews 12.2-3 - Let us...fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. **3** Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. [Hebrews 12.2-3]

Do you see this? Jesus endured the opposition —endured the cross—so that we would not grow weary and lose heart. He is the Lord of the Sabbath—the Lord of Rest.

The only real response to Jesus once you meet him, is to hate him or to love him. Which is it for you?