

STUDY SHEET FOR Mark 2:18-22 @ CAPC OAKLAND

LANGUAGE NOTES & TEXTUAL CONNECTIONS

The Gospel of Mark: *Author, Date, and Recipients*

The apostle Peter passed on reports of the words and deeds of Jesus to his attendant, John Mark, who wrote this Gospel for the wider church as the record of Peter's apostolic testimony. The book was likely written from Rome during the mid- to late-50s A.D. Mark's audience, largely unfamiliar with Jewish customs, needed to become familiar with such customs in order to understand the coming of Jesus as the culmination of God's work with Israel and the entire world, so Mark explains them.

fasting: The primary fast of the Jews was the Day of Atonement, one of the seven annual solemn assemblies of the Law of Moses. The Pharisees also fasted on the second and fourth days of every week. Apparently, the disciples of John were doing something similar. (The Pharisees didn't have disciples in the same sense as John or Jesus. The term "disciples of the Pharisees" might refer to anyone who followed the example of the Pharisees.)

Although such fasting was not part of the Law of Moses, by Jesus' day it had become an important expression of the Pharisees' meticulous devotion to the ceremonial law. To the Pharisees, if Jesus' disciples were not fasting, then it called into question their piety, sincerity and devotion toward the ceremonial law. Further, it called into question Jesus' attitude toward the ceremonial law. (<https://tinyurl.com/mcrbbcvf>)

The wedding attendants cannot fast while the bridegroom: Jesus obliquely explains that He is whom the Jewish people seek. According to Jesus, it is inappropriate to mourn in the presence of the Messiah. It is a time of celebration, similar to the week-long feasts held during a Jewish wedding.

The Messiah is not referred to as a groom in the Old Testament, but the metaphor of God as the husband of Israel is common, particularly in the book of Hosea. John the Baptist calls the Messiah the bridegroom in John 3:29.

It is only later, in retrospect, that Jesus's followers understand Him as the bridegroom to the church. Jesus will describe Himself as such in the parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1–13). Paul will deepen the imagery in his letters (2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:24–27). And the Apostle John will prophesy its fruition (Revelation 19:7–9).

In the Israeli culture of that time and place, winemaking was as common as eating and drinking. Clean water was scarce, and the climate of that area was especially favorable to viticulture, so out of necessity, wine was most often the drink at meals

To make wine, grapes were harvested and then, usually, spread out in the sun for a few days to increase their sugar content.

Next, they'd be crushed in large stone vats. Historians tell us that typically "the new wine was left in the vat to undergo the first fermentation, which took from four to seven days" After that, the wine would be strained and stored in

Mark 2:18-22 NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION

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?" 19 Jesus said to them, "The wedding attendants cannot fast while the bridegroom is with them, can they? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. 20 The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast on that day.

21 "No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak; otherwise, the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. 22 Similarly, no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins, but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins."

wineskins or jars to complete fermentation. Because new wine continued to ferment and emit gas inside its container, it was therefore crucial for it to be stored in new, supple wineskins. That way, the flexible nature of the wine container would allow it to expand and stay sealed as the fermentation process progressed. The idea of putting new wine in an old, inflexible wineskin would've been regarded as foolishly wasteful because the old, dried-out wineskin would simply crack and drain out all of the new wine.

Isaiah 58:6-9 (in particular)

NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION

¹ Announce to my people their rebellion,
to the house of Jacob their sins.
² Yet day after day they seek me
and delight to know my ways,
as if they were a nation that practiced
righteousness
and did not forsake the ordinance of their
God;
they ask of me righteous judgments;
they want God on their side.
³ "Why do we fast, but you do not see?
Why humble ourselves, but you do not
notice?"
Look, you serve your own interest on your fast
day
and oppress all your workers.
⁴ You fast only to quarrel and to fight
and to strike with a wicked fist.
Such fasting as you do today
will not make your voice heard on high.
⁵ Is such the fast that I choose,
a day to humble oneself?
Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush
and to lie in sackcloth and ashes?
Will you call this a fast,
a day acceptable to the LORD?

⁶ Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the straps of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?
⁷ Is it not to share your bread with the hungry
and bring the homeless poor into your
house;
when you see the naked, to cover them
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?
⁸ Then your light shall break forth like the
dawn,
and your healing shall spring up quickly;
your vindicator shall go before you;
the glory of the LORD shall be your rear
guard.
⁹ Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer;
you shall cry for help, and he will say, "Here I
am."
If you remove the yoke from among you,
the pointing of the finger, the speaking of
evil,
¹⁰ if you offer your food to the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,
then your light shall rise in the darkness
and your gloom be like the noonday.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & EXAMEN:

- What engaged, enraged, or surprised you in the text?
- Why are the scribes and pharisees so upset about Jesus and his disciples not fasting?
- How does he respond to their concern? What's he mean with this famous saying of the path and wineskins?
- For us today fasting is maybe a diet craze (intermittent fasting) much more than a spiritual practice. Isaiah 58:6-9 is perhaps one of the most famous scriptures about fasting – the fast that God desires. How does it interact with this story of Jesus and fasting in Mark 2?
- What does this story have to do with us? How does it speak to how we live our faith?
- What invitation do you hear the Spirit of God speaking to you – or to us, as a church – to act, speak, be, or change, through this word of scripture?

