

Mark 2:13-3:6

A reminder that I don't recommend you just taking these questions and repeating them entirely with your group. They are provided to help you work through the passage yourself, and prepare your own study which meets your group where it is at.

In some instances I have included block quotes from the Redeemer Presbyterian Church study guide on Mark. These are not intended to be read out to your group (though I suppose you could do that if you thought it would be useful), but because they articulate some of the ideas better than I could myself!

Context:

Consider the kinds of responses people have had to Jesus' ministry so far. It's actually been pretty successful and positive! People are following him, and he is becoming popular.

In 2:1-12, we saw that Jesus had started to become controversial. In verse 7, they accuse him of blasphemy (because he claimed to forgive sins, which only God can do). Nonetheless, the passage ends quite positively; verse 12 says that 'all were amazed and glorified God...'

Mark 2:13-3:6 is where Jesus begins to encounter real opposition. The passage ends with the Pharisees and Herodians working together to 'destroy' him. To put it lightly, this is pretty big opposition, pretty quickly!

Verses 13-14:

- In the previous study, we saw Jesus calling Simon, Andrew, James and John. Now he calls Levi.
What is different about this calling?
 - Levi is an obvious sinner – he is a tax collector, someone who had in a sense sided with the Roman rule, against his own people. He is not the sort of person that people would have expected a respected religious leader like Jesus to associate with. In those days, who you associated with said a lot about your character and values.

Verses 15-17:

- Jesus attracts certain people and repels others. Why? Have your group discuss this.
 - 'Jesus is turning normal religion on its head. He does not congratulate those who have attained a high degree of theological precision and moral discipline. Instead he warns them that they might be the farthest from him. In the next few incidents, Jesus challenges all sorts of expectations and practices of the religious and moral establishment.' Page 25 *The Gospel of Mark: Leaders Guide*, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, Tim Keller, 2005
- See verse 17. What does Jesus mean? (Who is he referring to?)
 - It is probable that Jesus is being ironic: by 'righteous' he most likely means 'self-righteous', and by 'sinners' he most likely means 'those who recognise their need for God's grace/forgiveness'. He is not against righteousness per se, but against the proud idea that we are fine and don't need God.
- What would be modern equivalents of tax collectors/sinners, and Scribes/Pharisees?

Which do the members of your group most identify with?

- Possible question for reflection: How can we follow Jesus' example in this? Direct the discussion to how we can be 'friends of sinners' without condoning sin.

Verses 18-20:

- See verse 18. Why were people concerned about Jesus' disciples not fasting?
 - Note: fasting often corresponded with grieving and repentance. See 2 Samuel 12 (especially verses 16-17, and 22-23) for example.
 - John's ministry focussed on repentance (recall Mark 1:4), because he was preparing people to meet Jesus. Hence, he and his followers fasted.
- What does Jesus' response indicate about who he is and what it means to know him?
 - Jesus is the bridegroom. See Isaiah 54:4-8, 62:5 for more on the OT meaning of this concept.
 - As a side-note, this is a MASSIVE claim. Again, Jesus is claiming to be God Himself. In the OT when God talked about a bridegroom, He meant Himself. Critics often say that Jesus made no outright claims to divinity, but he actually made many; you just have to know the OT connections to fully comprehend them.
 - Notice also in verse 20 the hint to Jesus' death and ascension ('when the bridegroom is taken away from them...')
 - In the Bible, weddings represent celebration and joy. Jesus introduced JOY, not mourning and despair. (Levi's party is a good example of this!) This is important to note: *Jesus is a bringer of joy, not a killjoy*, to put it cheesily.
 - What it means to follow Jesus:
 - It is to partake in that joy.
 - 'But now, Jesus says, his followers are like wedding guests! The guests at a wedding know they are "in" with the bridegroom. They have been welcomed. This is the whole point behind the bridegroom illustration — acceptance by God. The death of Jesus in our place is the guarantee of our acceptance and admittance.' Page 27 *The Gospel of Mark: Leaders Guide*, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, Tim Keller, 2005

Verses 21-22:

- We have seen in the previous two stories (Jesus eating with sinners, not fasting) a departure from previous religious attitudes and practices. How do verses 21-22 explain this? Have your group discuss this.
 - New wine in those days was put into containers of animal skins for fermentation. Since wine emitted gasses and expanded as it fermented, it had to be put into new skins which were flexible and capable of expansion. Old skins, already stretched, were brittle, and thus new wine was never placed in them. The general gist of the parable seems obvious — Jesus' coming brings something so powerful and new that it cannot be contained in existing forms. The 'wine' is Jesus and his gospel. The 'wineskins' are the external ways we worship, pray, repent, live in community, and live in the

world. Page 27 The Gospel of Mark: Leaders Guide, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, Tim Keller, 2005

- For those of us who have never followed Jewish practices (sacrificial and purity laws, etc.), what does this mean for us? (Leading question: are we nonetheless tempted to create our own pseudo-laws for ourselves or others?)
 - In general, there is a shift from the complexity of so many regulations and external rules and minutiae toward a much simpler practice. Why? Religion is filled with rules and traditions because observers are not sure where they stand with the deity. Multiplication of rules and duties grow out of our insecurity and uncertainty. Jesus and “grace” blows away the morbid, rigid, externalistic forms religious life had taken. Now with the gospel of Christ, we do things a) with grateful joy, knowing God loves us, b) with willingness, realizing how little God asks compared to what he’s already given, and, c) with understanding that these duties are ways of knowing God better and growing into his likeness — not ways to merit his love. Page 28 The Gospel of Mark: Leaders Guide, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, Tim Keller, 2005
 - Jesus is saying here — “if I come into your life, I will change everything”. It is typical for people to first approach Christ or Christianity with the hope that they will get help and support for their old life. They have expectations, goals, views of what is important, what they need, where they should be going. They come saying: “I want help to get the things that will fulfill me and make me happy. Will Jesus help me to get to my goals?” Jesus says here — “Don’t ask me to come in and simply help you with your old life. When I come in I give a whole new life. I will change everything. I won’t help you with your agenda; I’ll give you a whole new agenda.” Jesus shatters our categories. This is a very threatening statement!
Page 28 The Gospel of Mark: Leaders Guide, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, Tim Keller, 2005

Have your group reflect on this idea. What would it look like have a ‘whole new agenda’? To have Jesus’ agenda for our lives? Do you think that you have allowed Jesus to complete re-write your life, or are you asking him (in the language of the quote) to support your old life?

Chapter 2:23-3:6:

- What is the purpose of the Sabbath? (See verses 27 and 28)
- What does Jesus reveal about himself here? What does “Lord of the Sabbath” mean?
 - See Genesis 1 and 2. YAHWEH (God) created the Sabbath.
- What does 3:1-6 show about what the Sabbath is really about?
 - Notice that the man receives healing and restoration from God (Jesus).
- Are you finding rest and restoration in God regularly? Why/why not?
- How are we to experience that now?
 - It’s important to recognise the tension that we experience as Christians living in this ‘in-between’ time (after Jesus’ ascension, but before his second coming to fully establish his rule). We don’t experience complete, lasting, rest.
 - Check out Hebrews 4:9 (and surrounding verses) to explore this more.

- In Jesus, we find rest from unhelpful religious practices; not from God himself, but from the things that get in the way. Notice how the people who have 'rest' are those who follow Jesus (Levi, his disciples). Those who oppose Jesus do not have rest; their self-righteousness is constantly demanding.
- In verse 6, the controversy that was bubbling away at the beginning of the chapter has boiled up into outright opposition and hatred. The Pharisees and Herodians now conspire together to 'destroy' him.

Side note: it is interesting that to follow Jesus means to encounter *both* conflict (as he and his followers do in this chapter) and rest. How do people in your Small Group experience this?