

THE NEWNESS JESUS BRINGS

MARK 2:18-3:6

Well, good morning church! It's good to be with you here this morning.

We are continuing our series in the gospel of Mark. And Mark, if you remember, is focused on revealing to us as readers of his gospel, the identity and mission of Jesus, and what it looks like to follow this Jesus. He wants to show us who Jesus is and what he's come to do, and he does that by sort of letting us backstage, by letting us behind the curtain to see the real Jesus, and he does that right at the opening of the gospel by giving us this privileged information that this Jesus we're going to see is the Christ, the Son of God.

But all the while what's playing out on stage in these interactions between Jesus and his disciples, and the the crowds, and the Pharisees, and the authorities - no one is clueing in to the real Jesus are they? Throughout Mark, the only people that get Jesus are the God the Father, the demons, and at the very end of the gospel, for a brief moment at the cross, this outsider, a Roman soldier. Everyone else is missing him.

And this Jesus that Mark reveals to us, everywhere he goes, is reorganizing and shifting the expectations of everyone he encounters right? And since he is the living Christ, Jesus ought to be doing the same for us as we read Mark. The Jesus that we're seeing here on these pages should be blowing some of our boxes of how we've seen and understood him and his work in our life. And my hope is that he does that this morning as he is present with us, his bride, his body, by the power of his Holy Spirit.

Most of you know that my wife Eli and I spent almost 10 years in China as missionaries, and it was in my first year in China that I bought my dream machine - a beautiful, aerodynamic, single-speed, two-wheeled silver bicycle made by the legendary Chinese bicycle brand "Flying Pigeon."

For the equivalent of \$60 bucks U.S., this was a slick ride. And for the first several weeks that I owned the bike, the Flying Pigeon really lived up to its name! I rode through the streets of our city of 13 million like I was chasing down the lead pack in the Tour de France. I mean this huge white dude flying in and out of 4'10" Chinese ladies on electric bikes must have been quite a sight.

But, although initially, the Flying Pigeon seemed to hold up pretty well the my style of riding, I figured out by week 4 that it wasn't exactly made for a 6'5", 220lb westerner. One day,

out of the blue, when I was still about 3 miles out from my apartment, the right crank arm that attached my pedal to the bike started to wobble. I slowed my pedaling and started cruising at the relaxing pace of most of the locals, but it didn't slow the wobble on my crank. In fact, after another mile of riding, the crank arm fell off completely.

Luckily, on almost every corner of a Chinese city there is a middle-aged man with a wooden cart ready to repair any and every bicycle issue. So I stopped in at the next corner I saw. And I put my bike down, and rather sheepishly in my broken, survival level Mandarin, I handed him my pedal and crank arm and said, "this... broken." Thinking this man would really know what he was doing, I settled onto a nearby wooden stool to watch the professional in action. The man rifled through his tool drawer looking for just the right tool for this particular job. After a minute he appeared from behind his wooden cart carrying a large rubber mallet, put the crank arm back on the bottom bracket, gave a couple of firm hits from the mallet, and handed me the bike with a satisfied smile. Well, he's the professional I thought, maybe this will work.

Well, I got back on the bike and with that pit stop behind me I got back in the race. But within a couple of days the same problem started again. My crank arm began to wobble, and before long it fell off. I headed back to Mr. Mallet, complained to him, and this time he banged it on again a little harder. As you can imagine, my visits to Mr. Mallet became pretty regular. Loving everything else about my flying pigeon and not wanting to spend my limited funds a new bicycle, I learned to just live with my Flying Pigeon's broken wing.

I want you to take a step back and look at your own life for a moment, and I think if you are a human being here this morning, if you walked in here breathing, and if you are completely honest with yourself, you will recognize that there are parts of your life that aren't working this morning. There are spots in you where you feel the wobble of your pedals, maybe where you even feel like the wheels are about to fall off. Every one of us has this sense in our own lives, and in the world around us, that there is stuff that is just out of joint.

Even as a Christian and a pastor there are corners of my heart where I sense the brokenness that sin creates in me and in the people around me, where I feel the dull ache of discontentment, where my pride creates destruction. There are places and moments where I become starkly aware of the friction between the way things should be and the way they actually are.

But just like me and my flying pigeon, we get sort of used to this brokenness, don't we? Or at least we get used to covering it up, patching it over, giving it a quick fix and then moving on with life. What we ultimately want is comfort and convenience, and we're going to aim at getting those things as easily as possible, even if we end up not dealing with our underlying issues.

And all too often, as church people, we try to use religion as the tool for that quick fix. Does this sound familiar to you? Life is limping along, you sense that you're missing something, that something is out of joint - maybe it's your marriage, maybe it's your job, maybe it's your finances... and so you double down on your commitment to Jesus - you pull your Bible down off the shelf, you start coming to church on Sundays, you resolve to do better, to be better, because you want life to start going better.

But the Jesus we see in our text this morning, the living Christ who is among us as his church, he's not here to just to do a quick repair job on us. Jesus isn't interested in band aiding our problems, he doesn't want to just patch things together, he's not interested, as Ray Orlund would say, in just "giving us an upgrade," nor is he interested in maintaining the status quo for us. ***Jesus wants to bring newness into our lives this morning.***

Wherever Jesus shows up, and whenever his kingdom starts breaking in, whether its the first century or whether its the 21st century, he starts overhauling things. Like if your life was a house, Jesus is going to walk in he's not just going to rearrange the furniture, he's going to start knocking out walls. And in this passage we're going to see that Jesus wants to tear down our old approaches to life, and he especially wants to deconstruct the place that have used religion as a quick fix for our brokenness.

Jesus isn't interested in our comfort and convenience, what he wants is to bring the newness of his life, his glory, his person - into *our* lives. You know, I am not interested in just showing up week after we here at Summit, just patching ourselves together by doing religion. That will absolutely wear me out - and it will wear you out. What we want and what we need is the real Jesus. Because he doesn't want to patch us up, he wants to make us new.

And so this morning what we're going to see in through these three interconnected stories is exactly that. There's a lot going on here, and I'm going to try and do it justice, but I'm not going to be able to hit on everything... At the hear of the passage ttyhh3yh7Mark is telling us that Jesus brings a radical newness to our lives in the form of a new relationship and a new religion. So that's how we're going to unpack this passage this morning. We're going to go a bit

out of order from the unfolding of the text, but we're going to see 1.) the radical newness Jesus brings *in the form of* 2.) a new relationship and 3.) a new religion.

1. A Radical Newness

All of this talk of newness begins with a simple question about fasting. Mark introduces the story with a bit of context:

v. 18: "Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting..."

Now fasting wasn't an uncommon practice among first century Jews, but it wasn't a major prescription of the OT law. The only regular fast required by the Mosaic Law was on the Day of Atonement and after Israel returned from exile there were four more annual fasts that were added to their religious calendar. But fasting wasn't this absolutely central practice of religious life.

But it was pretty common that religious groups within Judaism would fast more regularly. This was the Varsity team of religious life. The people that were super-spiritual would make this a regular practice - and especially the Pharisees we know from other places in the gospels, would make such an outward sign of their fasting that everyone would know how spiritual they were being.

And so it's into that context that this question comes:

"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?'"

In other words, the question they are trying to ask is - why do your followers, in fact, why does your movement, Jesus, seem to be not as religious in the ways we've understood religion.

We're going to handle vs. 19-20 in a moment, but in vs. 21-22 Jesus answers their question on a broader level by introducing the radical newness that he's bringing into the world, and that he wants to bring into our lives.

What Jesus says here gives us a framework for understanding this entire passage. These two verses are sort of the hub that this text turns on. Jesus gives us two pictures, two illustrations of the glorious newness that he is bringing.

Here's the first, v.21: "No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the patch tears away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made."

I don't know if you've ever sewn a patch onto something, I definitely never have. I consider myself pretty domesticated in other ways, like I iron my own shirts, but I don't mend. I

mean, we've kind of become the disposable generation - we buy paper plates and plastic forks - and we toss our old clothes when a hole is worn in them.

So it's only some of you that are older that might get what Jesus is saying here. But if your coat has a tear in it, you can't sew a new patch onto an old coat, right? The material of the new patch is so different from the old and worn material, that if you try to use it to cover up a hole, as you wash it, it's eventually going to shrink and tear away from the rest of the garment.

In other words, here's what Jesus is saying. He's saying that he will not just be a patch on the holes of your old life. The newness that he brings is too radical for that.

You see the Pharisees, and even John's disciples, represented an old approach to religion. We're going to talk about it more, but especially for the Pharisees there was something utterly incomplete in the way they using their religion system to fix what they perceived was wrong in their world. And Jesus is saying that in his arrival, he is not just coming to do a quick mending job on this old outlook.

And Jesus is saying the same thing to us this morning. If you try to use Jesus, or at least the religious trappings of Jesus-sounding stuff, like the Pharisees did, as just a gloss on the outside surface of your life - but all the while, underneath, you're trying to keep your old systems, your old outlooks, your old approaches to life — the problem, Jesus says, ends up worse than you started with. The holes in your life get bigger and you end up tired, worn out, miserable, and still not whole.

Then here's Jesus' second illustration. It's kind of like the first, but with a different emphasis: V. 22: "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."

Jesus is saying that you can't just pour a little Jesus into the old ways you've done life, you can't just add him to your old ways of thinking, and have it work. What Jesus wants to do didn't fit in with the ways of thinking and the paradigms of religion and relationship with God Jesus was encountering in the first century, and what Jesus wants to do won't fit the current status quo of your own life either. Jesus is bringing a radical newness that overhauls the assumptions we've had about how and where he fits into our life.

Well, if that is all a bit scary for us — Jesus overhauling our life... The picture Jesus uses to illustrate the newness he brings - as new wine - should bring us hope.

Wine, throughout the biblical storyline, is always representative of life, and joy and gladness. We might feel like the newness Jesus brings threatens to kill us, but it is actually

Jesus' means to give us life and joy. And he begins doing that through bringing us into a new relationship.

2. A New Relationship

v. 19. Here's Jesus' other answer to that question about about fasting.

"Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast."

Like a lot of Jesus' answers, there is a bit of mystery, a hiddenness to what he's saying. Who's the bridegroom? We can figure out pretty quickly from the way Jesus answers. He's talking about himself. But why does he use this wedding language?

This wedding picture would have been a familiar one for Jesus' listeners. Both in their day to day experience - and at the level of their biblical understanding.

Throughout the Old Testament God uses the verbiage of marriage and wedding feasts and matrimony to talk about his relationship to his people. In fact, when we look at Scripture as a whole it seems that from the first wedding in the the Garden between Adam and Eve to the great wedding banquet of the Lamb that John so vividly sees in Revelation - the story of Redemption is ultimately a love story of the romance between God and his people.

I'm not sure whether Jesus' listeners would have caught all the nuance here, but in his answer to this simple question Jesus is saying that the Old Testament beginnings of this love story between God and his people ultimately find their climax and fulfillment in him.

You see, God had seen Israel, his people, as his bride. We see that language most starkly in the prophet Hosea where Yahweh declares (2:10ff), "in that day you will call me My Husband... I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness, and you shall know the Lord."

God's people, who were broken and sinful and rebellious, who had prostituted themselves to nations around them and to their gods and betrayed their own God, God is promising that he is eventually going to woo them and win them back to himself again. And so as N.T. Wright says, "when Jesus describes his ministry in terms of the bridegroom at a wedding reception, there are disturbing new meanings in the air." In Jesus, God is coming to marry his people.

Maybe this wedding language is new for you. You see it's easy for us to understand the gospel in static, transactional categories. We believe in Jesus. God forgives our sin. He gives us

eternal life. We're made right before the judge. And these things are all true, but the Bible as a whole paints a much more intimate picture of what Jesus has come to do for us and in us. He's come to marry his bride.

Ray Ortlund puts it this way: "The Son of God entered into the world to gather a people to himself. He came across the tracks to the wrong side of town to find her. He did not choose the beauty queen, he chose the slut, made her his bride, and made her beautiful."

Jesus brings into our lives a radical newness through new relationship.

Two things I want to say really quick. First - God marries his people, but he only marries you personally as you are a part of his people. So be careful how you apply this personally. Ladies - Jesus is not individually *your* husband. As his church, he's corporately our bridegroom. Second - Guys, this is a hard one for us right? It puts us in the position of the bride. To be honest it puts us in the vulnerable position of need, we're the ones being sought after, we the ones being wooed.

But even as guys, if we hear what Jesus has to say to us through this picture it changes us. What it means is that Jesus comes to us in all our brokenness and weakness and mess and sin - in the midst of all the junk we're trying to cover over and patch up - and promises himself to us. He vows all of himself for us. He gives himself to us whole-heartedly. This gospel, this type of Jesus, isn't just a religious patch for the few places we need holes filled in. Do you see that we can't relegate this Jesus to the attics or crawl-spaces of our lives to pull out during certain seasons when we need him.

If we get the depth of this new relationship with God that Jesus is bringing, and we enter into the joy of it, it will begin to actually heal the deepest levels of our brokenness. But the fullness of that healing still awaits a future day. That's what Jesus is pointing to in v. 20. "The days will come," Jesus says, "when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day."

We live between the times. Fasting is this physical picture of hunger and longing. We live between the betrothal and the consummation of the marriage at the great wedding feast. And so we enjoy in some measure the wonder of our new relationship to God, but we long for the day when we're joined to him for eternity.

3. Jesus brings a radical newness in the form of a new relationship, and secondly in the form of A New Religion

Read with me beginning at v. 23: (*read 23-24*)

To understand what's going on here we need to understand the Pharisees a little better. The Pharisees were like the Moral Majority of First Century Israel. They were the theological and moral neat nicks who wanted to make sure every rule was followed, every commandment obeyed, every life purified. But this wasn't just because they were religious curmudgeons.

You see, a few hundred years before this, Israel had been sent back to the land from their exile and had been given permission to start rebuilding the temple and the city of Jerusalem. And many people came back, but many stayed behind. And through the exiles of Israel and Judah, other Jews had been scattered through the other nations around Israel. And the Jerusalem Israel came back to, and the temple they built was nothing like it was before. Israel was still a people occupied. They were ruled by one dynasty after another - Babylon, then Persia, then the Greeks, and finally the Romans. Even though they were back in their land, it was like their exile had never ended. And so the people continued to hold on to the promises of the prophets for a new Exodus, a new return from exile where God would gather this scattered people together, drive out the foreign powers, and rule over them as their King in a new kingdom.

The Pharisees were the conservative, nationalistic, patriotic religious party. They knew that the reason Israel had been driven into exile was their disobedience to God's Law and compromise with the nations around them, and so the redemptive act of God to set up his new kingdom depended on Israel's radical obedience to the law and separation from the pagan nations that ruled them and lived among them. And so the Pharisees added an extensive interpretive code to Old Testament law, thinking they were helping people to obey God in the exact ways he required, because it was through moral and religious reform that God would bring about the newness he had promised. The Pharisees were using the stuff of religion to try to fix what they perceived as broken.

And the Sabbath was one of the most important pieces of the law for Israel to obey. Not only was this part of God's explicit command from creation, it was the separator between Israel and the nations. It was one of the badges that marked Israel as God's chosen people.

So when the Pharisees come upon Jesus' disciples doing what their rigorous theology would define as "harvesting" on the Sabbath - they are not happy. And they question Jesus as to why his disciples are disobeying the law.

Jesus' answer - just like his answer about fasting - takes some work to understand. Jesus says to them v. 25...

We're not going to go back and read the story, but Jesus points back to a scene in 1 Samuel where King David - after he was anointed King but still on the run from Saul - went into the house of God and took the bread that was meant as an offering to be always before the face of God and took it for his men and him to eat.

And this is kind of an obscure story, and we don't have time to unpack all that's going on here. But Jesus' summarizes his understanding and application of the story in v. 27. The point is this: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

Here's what Jesus is saying: He's not actually bringing a new religion, what he brings is a fulfillment of all that the Old Testament point to - but Jesus reorients our approach to religion. He's saying: "The trappings of religion - these moral markers - they're not meant to be used to try and get what only I can bring."

You see, the Sabbath wasn't just a rule God had instituted, the Sabbath pictured and pictures the newness God is bringing into the world. The rest and joy and satisfaction and newness pictured and promised through the Sabbath pointed to the fullness of *rest* of God's people entering the Promised Land, to the joy and completeness that would come in the New Covenant, and ultimately as we see that rest pressed forward into the New Testament, it points to the rest and newness that we now have in Christ, and that God will bring fully in the age to come when he deals with all the effects of sin and the curse and consummates his new creation. And so when Jesus declares that he is Lord over the Sabbath he is saying that it's not religious performance or moral superiority or isolation from the world - it's not getting just enough Jesus to maintain our own comfort and convenience or keep the status quo - none of these things bring newness and joy and rest into our lives, only the real Jesus can.

If you are worn out and burned out on religion, then Jesus shows up this morning as Lord of the Sabbath to bring some altogether better - himself. The one who makes things new brings to humanity God's Sabbath rest.

And we see that on display in the last story - Jesus enters a synagogue and a man was there with a withered hand - and they watched to see how the Lord of the Sabbath would deal with this brokenness on the Sabbath. And Jesus said to the man - this man who is suffering and struggling with the brokenness of his life. This man who already is starkly aware that religion is not going to patch over his problems. Jesus says to him - "Come here."

And that's what Jesus is saying to us this morning. To us who are broken and disjointed and weak and needy. To us who are withered and worn out by the status quo in our lives. To us who need Jesus' newness, he invites us to come close.

Read vv. 3:4. What do you think? Yeah, the Sabbath Jesus brings is about goodness and life right? vv. 4-6. It was made new!

Do you see the irony here? On this day that points to God's redemptive plan to bring good and life to his people, Jesus brings newness while the Pharisees and Herodians plot death.

And in that irony we see a hint of how Jesus actually brings his newness into our lives. You see, this plotting that starts here in chapter 3, comes to fruition in chapter 14. And Jesus is handed over to the religious leaders and the Christ, the bridegroom, the Lord of the Sabbath, the perfect Son of God, is crucified. And on that cross we see Jesus' words here in v. 4 reversed for us. Jesus is harmed and killed so that we would have good and life. At the cross Jesus body is torn so that we can experience newness. He drinks the cup of God's wrath that we might receive the new wine of his grace.

This is more than a patch or quick fix for our brokenness. This is new life.