

Gospel of Mark

Chapter 2

Introduction

Welcome to Mark Chapter 2 – We hope you may have had an opportunity to read the chapter through a few times and that as you do there might be things that call out to you that raise the imagination and that perhaps challenge you, and invite you to ask questions of the text and of yourselves?

Short Reflection

Mark or John-Mark as we find him referred to elsewhere is thought to have been an early gentile convert, it would be fun to imagine he might have been in Jerusalem at Pentecost? What we do know is that he was mentored by Peter and it is suggested that much of his Gospel is Mark faithfully recording the accounts of Jesus from the preaching of Peter. His accounts were intended for a mainly gentile readership.

Hence it often feels like Mark reads like a series of news flashes – this chapter is no exception! It starts with the news “Jesus is in town!” Jesus has made it to Capernaum and people were eager to meet with him, his reputation had gone before him.

This reflection will focus on verses 18-22, in each of the four parts of this Chapter we find Jesus being challenged, accused of blasphemy and failure to keep to the norms of society. ·

- Healing and forgiving of sins – “Only God can forgive sins!”
- Eating and associating with the wrong people – the despised and rejected
- Failing to fast – Not following the example set by John’s disciples and the Pharisees
- Breaking the sabbath – yet the Sabbath was God given!

To each of these Jesus’ response was to communicate that something new was happening. Jesus is asked as to why followers were not fasting (v.18-22), a question that comes from ‘some people’, not attributed to the Pharisees or Scribes. Perhaps because the practice of fasting was in some part at the very heart of the identity of the Jewish nation, like keeping the Sabbath rest, that made them distinctive from their neighbours. Failure to fast or keep the Sabbath would have been regarded as deep affront to many.

Tom Wright speaks of these passages as being written not to highlight legalism or a failure in Judaism to impress God by keeping to the rules. It was a heralding, an announcement that in Jesus there is a fulfilment of hope and the coming of God’s Kingdom. As Marc highlighted last week it was a sign that God, in Jesus is doing a new thing!

That is was a time for celebration, not for fasting, Christ is the bridegroom.

Jesus does not condemn fasting, after all he fasted 40 days and nights in the wilderness. He gives clear instruction in Matthew 6:16 “when you fast” that is an opportunity to commune with the Father not to impress others.

Fasting as an act of worship and submission, is a time to draw near in humility recognising our dependence on God. In today's society fasting has taken us away from the rituals surrounding food, for us it might be putting aside something we do, to use the time to seek God, in solitude (if lock-down will permit) and prayer.

Here in Mark Jesus is inviting his followers to a party, a time to celebrate with the bridegroom. A time for jubilation and rejoicing as Jesus gives us glimpses of what His Kingdom will look like; the paralysed will be healed, sins will be forgiven, the marginalised and those whom society rejects invited to take their place at the meal table with Jesus.

Jesus speaks also of a time when the celebration will cease, when the bridegroom is taken up (v.20), then there will be a time for fasting. A quiet acknowledgement that God's kingdom will only come through His suffering and death. Whilst his disciples will experience the pain of loss and confusion.

Here in these passages Jesus is the visible representation of the Kingdom. As Jesus invited us to us the pray... Thy Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven!

This new Kingdom is not one that can be patched on to the old understanding, tacked on to what existed before, Jesus came to make all things new. Reusing the wine skins for the new wine or patching up the fabric was not an option, this is not a quick repair job, this is a complete renewal. We are invited to pray for the fullness of God's kingdom here on Earth, we are invited to the party!

Questions

1. What comes to mind when you pray the Lord's prayer “Thy Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven”? How expectant are we? What does it look like?
2. The Kingdom of God – “if you want to know what a country is like before you've been there, the best way is to meet its citizens.”[1] As His ambassadors are there creative ways we might seek to promote God's Kingdom here on earth?
3. What are your thoughts on ‘fasting’? – A Discipline? A Delight? Or Don't go there?

Prayer

Lord, help us to be ready to party (read Luke 15.7), help us to join with the angels to celebrate God's Kingdom here on earth, this week pray for someone you know who needs God's salvation. That they might receive the Good News of Jesus.

Consider setting aside a moment to fast this week (turn off the phone or the TV) – to quietly get right with God and wait on Him, write down anything you feel God might have brought to mind and share it with a friend and/or with your small group next week.