

"How is it that He Eats and Drinks?"

What is appropriate behavior for the people of God? What is the appropriate behavior for the leaders of God's people? In our passage for today, we see Jesus eating and drinking. He is eating and drinking with his disciples. He is eating and drinking with tax collectors and others who were known as sinners. And it is in the midst of his eating and drinking where we see more opposition rise up against Jesus. First we see opposition question the disciples about Jesus. And then we see opposition question Jesus about his disciples. The first episode is surrounding this feast that Jesus is having with tax collectors and sinners. The second episode is concerning why Jesus disciples have not been regularly fasting. But both of these episodes, both rounds of opposition, are ultimately asking the same thing. They are both asking about the appropriateness of Jesus' conduct and his behavior in leading his disciples.

Note the context for these two episodes. The context is in light of the forgiveness of sins. Remember that in the previous passage, which we looked at last week, we saw Jesus not only heal a paralytic, but declare to him that his sins were forgiven. Now here in the next episode in Mark, we see Jesus calling tax collectors and sinners to repentance. Of course, Jesus calling such people to repentance, presumes that forgiveness of sins is available. And then in the next episode, we see that Jesus says that his disciples must not be fasting while he is with him. The sort of regular fasting that is in view here is likely a fasting that was done as a way to mourn for one's sins and seek forgiveness by God. For Jesus' disciples to not fast while he is with him, suggests, at least in some veiled way, that the forgiveness of sins is already present with Christ. This context of the forgiveness of sins is important, because this is essential to the question of whether or not Jesus' actions here in chapter 2 are appropriate. If Jesus, by his authority, is bringing the forgiveness of sins to his disciples, then that will radically inform the discussion of what is appropriate behavior here. And so as we study this passage and these two episodes, we'll be looking at the objections that are raised to Jesus, and we'll see what Jesus has to say about the appropriateness of his actions. We'll ultimately see how this relates to the forgiveness of sins which Jesus has come to announce as part of the coming of the kingdom.

And so look with me at the first episode in verses 13-17. In verses 13-17 we see the calling of Levi, a tax collector, which is followed by a banquet of sorts held at Levi's house. Look at this call to Levi in verse 14. In verse 14, Jesus sees a tax collector, Levi, sitting at his tax booth, doing his work. Levi apparently was one of the tax collectors who taxed imported merchandise as it came into the area. And so Levi was likely in some sort of tax booth that was stationed along a trade route. And Jesus comes up to Levi and says to him, "Follow me," and Levi immediately gets up and follows Jesus. This incident is reminiscent of the way Jesus called his first four disciples in chapter 1. In both instances the disciples who are called are busy about their work. In both instances Jesus calls them with just a few brief words. In both instances the disciples instantly respond by dropping what they are doing and immediately following Jesus. And yet let me highlight one difference for you. When Peter, Andrew, James, and John were called in Mark chapter 1, I mentioned how they were the unlikeliest of disciples. They were not well trained, they were just ordinary fisherman. But here, Levi, is not just an unlikely candidate to be Jesus disciple. He was a tax collector. Jesus selection of a tax collector to be his disciple, is not just an unlikely

selection, it's almost a scandalous selection, at least from the perspective of the Pharisees, as we'll see in a moment.

You see a tax collector at that time was despised by most Jews, especially the Pharisees. This was for several reasons. First, tax collectors ultimately were working for the Romans, the people who were Israel's captor. And so they were effectively supporting the ongoing Roman occupation of Israel. Second, tax collectors were notorious for gouging the people in terms of taxes, greatly marking up the required taxes and pocketing the surplus. Third, tax collectors typically would have to interact with gentiles all the time, which especially the Pharisees saw as infecting behavior.

And so the call of Levi to discipleship, a known tax collector, was more than just an unlikely choice by Jesus. It would have been considered scandalous. Why would Jesus want to disciple someone like that? This attitude is brought out explicitly in the event that follows. After Jesus calls Levi, we then see in verse 15 that Jesus goes with Levi back to his house where Levi hosts a feast for Jesus and his disciples. And at this feast, we find more tax collectors and "sinners", apparently to hear and learn from Jesus.

It is in this context, that we find the first opposition to Jesus in our passage. When the scribes who were Pharisees saw Jesus eating and drinking with this group of people, they ask his disciples about Jesus, saying, "How is it that He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?" These learned Pharisees obviously did not approve of Jesus' company. You see, it was established Pharisaical tradition that a good Pharisee did not eat with the quote "people of the land". And so when our text describes Jesus' company as "tax collectors and sinners", this is basically short hand to describe a group of people that were despised by the Pharisees. The "people of the land" were the common people who were unlearned. They were untrained in both God's laws, and also the Pharisaical traditions as well. They would not have kept God's laws as revealed in the Torah, and certainly would not have kept the vast traditions that the Pharisees setup around God's laws. Consequently, such people were seen as "sinners". And so these tax collectors and sinners that Jesus was feasting with would have been representative of this group of people who were despised by the Pharisees. They were religious outcasts. And so they would have been sinners in two senses - one a legitimate sense in which they did not religiously keep God's laws, and a second illegitimate sense in that they were not observers of the Pharisaical traditions.

And so the Pharisee's tradition did not look favorably toward the faithful dining with such people, especially teachers. And so this question by these Pharisees to Jesus' disciple contained an implied rebuke to Jesus. They basically were questioning the appropriateness of Jesus behavior. They did not believe it was appropriate for Jesus as a teacher of the law to be in such close relationship with these sinners. They were basically accusing Jesus of being spiritually degenerate in this matter.

But look at Jesus' response in verse 17. Their question and implied rebuke evidently makes it to Jesus' ears. Jesus responds by quoting a known proverb of the time, saying, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick." This proverb would have been known and surely appreciated by these well trained scribes. With this proverb, Jesus appeals to a well known truth to answer their question on whether or not it is appropriate for him to be dining with these people. He says it is *quite* appropriate for a doctor to be attending to the sick. Jesus then applies this proverb to the situation saying, "I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." Jesus says that these tax collectors and sinners, the despised of the Pharisees, are the sick who need a physician.

Jesus is that physician, calling these sinners to repentance, telling them of their need for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus responds to this opposition by saying that *is* appropriate for him to be eating and drinking with sinners. He says it would actually be inappropriate if he was not!

But if Jesus is the physician, and these sinners and tax collectors are the sick, who are the righteous in Jesus' statement? Are they the Pharisees? Well, it appears that the Pharisees would think so. But Jesus doesn't call them the righteous; instead he leaves it open to their interpretation. Jeremiah 17:9 says that the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick. These learned Pharisees should have understood Jesus' words in two ways. One, they would have seen them as a justification for Jesus dining with these sinners. Two, they would have understood these words as a rebuke against themselves. For these Pharisees should have recognized their own sickness and come to Jesus the Great Physician, instead of exalting themselves above others, self-righteously setting themselves up as the healthy. If you are in denial that you are sick, then you will never go to the doctor to be healed. It is the sick who admit that they are diseased and dying, who go to the doctor, that can be healed. And yet, in our passage, we see Jesus, the Great Physician himself going to the sick, telling them that they are sick, and healing them, through his call of faith and repentance.

And so that is the first episode in our passage for today, the first scene of opposition. Look with me now at the second opposition, in the second episode in our passage. Look with me at verse 18. Mark transitions to this new scene by telling us that both the disciples of John and the Pharisees were regularly fasting, and yet Jesus' disciples were not fasting. Presumably the disciples of John and the Pharisees were fasting as a sort of religious mourning for their sins. This would have been very fitting for John's disciples, as John lived a rather ascetic lifestyle in his wilderness ministry, calling people to repentance. And the Pharisees at that time were known to fast twice a week, often with much fanfare to show off how religious they were. Of course, the Old Testament scriptures only mandate one day a year where fasting is required, on the Day of Atonement, the day when the high priest was to enter the Holy of Holies, offering a sacrifice for the sins of the people.

And so more opposition comes to Jesus here on this issue about fasting. Some people come to Jesus asking why his disciples are not fasting like these others. They ask, in verse 18, "Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" Another way of asking this same question might be, "why do you and your disciples come eating and drinking?" Notice that here the question is not about who Jesus and the disciples are eating with, it's that they are eating and drinking in general. They are basically questioning the appropriateness of Jesus and his disciples. They are questioning if it is appropriate for Jesus' disciples to not be fasting. Their question might have also contained an implied rebuke of Jesus. Ultimately this accusation on the disciples falls back on Jesus who is their teacher and leader. Is Jesus appropriately leading them in godliness by not instructing them to regularly fast? Is Jesus discipling them in godliness or in spiritually degenerate practices?

Jesus responds to this opposition with a question of his own. In verse 19 he asks, "Can the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them?" He then answers his own question with a definitive "no"! He says, "As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast." Jesus' wedding example strikes at the heart of their question. They had asked him regarding the appropriateness of their lack of fasting. Jesus replies with an example that addresses the appropriateness. Clearly it would be inappropriate for the friends who are

attending the bridegroom to be fasting in his presence. A wedding is a happy and joyous occasion. You don't mourn and fast during that occasion! You celebrate!

Of course Jesus' illustration here of the bridegroom and his friends obviously suggests that Jesus is the bridegroom and the disciples are his friends. This demands people to ask, "Who is Jesus, and what is the right response to him and his teaching?"

And of course this metaphor of Jesus being the bridegroom is a fitting image. For Jesus has come to announce good news, something worthy to celebrate! He has come to bring the good news of the coming kingdom. And he comes as the king of this wonderful kingdom! Though the kingdom had not yet fully arrived, and wouldn't be inaugurated until the cross, yet Jesus, as king of this kingdom, essentially brings his kingdom wherever he goes. Wherever Jesus is at, he brings the kingdom with him, for he is the king of this kingdom!

And though this is a kingdom which demands repentance, Jesus makes clear that when his disciples are with him, that this repentance should quickly turn to gladness and rejoicing. Jesus, the Great Bridegroom, has come with joy and gladness. His coming is a time of happiness and rejoicing, not a time of mourning and sadness.

In other words, Jesus responds to this opposition by saying that it *is* appropriate for him and his disciples to be eating and drinking. He says it would actually be inappropriate if they were fasting, as long as Jesus is with them! And so this demands that we too ask who Jesus is and what the appropriate response is to him and his good news.

And so we've looked at two oppositions made to Jesus in our passage today. We've seen two objections that have been raised to Jesus in the form of a question. Both of these questions have a few things in common. They both are objections to Jesus. They both deal in part with the subject of eating and drinking. And both of these questions are questions of appropriateness. They question the appropriateness of Jesus' actions and his leadership of his disciples. In light of these objections, obviously Jesus was not doing what was expected from someone who is supposedly a religious leader. These questions of appropriateness threatened to accuse Jesus of being spiritually degenerate. Were they calling him gluttonous and a lush? Were they accusing him of hanging out with the wrong crowd? Were they charging him with a lack of spirituality, not engaging in spiritual disciplines such as fasting?

And yet all these questions of appropriateness beg a question. They all beg a context. Are these actions appropriate in light of what? What is the context? What defines what is appropriate or not? Clearly the Pharisees were evaluating the appropriateness of these situations in a way different than Jesus. They were judging the appropriateness from different perspectives.

You see in our passage, Jesus goes on to address this with the two parables in verses 21-22. Both of these parables deal with this question of appropriateness. In the first parable Jesus describes an old garment with a tear in it. He says that no one takes a new piece of unshrunk cloth and uses it for a patch on the old garment. He says that would be inappropriate because that new cloth would then shrink and rip the old garment even worse! It would be inappropriate to use the new cloth on the old garment. Notice that Jesus doesn't propose a solution for this first parable, though two seem possible. You could use a piece of already shrunk cloth as a patch, in order to mend the old garment. But a second option is you could use the new cloth to make a new garment. In light of Jesus' second parable, that seems like the implied better solution.

In Jesus second parable, he says that no one puts new wine in old wineskins, otherwise it would burst the wineskins and lose the wine. New wine was wine which was just recently harvested and so still going through the fermentation process. This fermentation produces carbon dioxide which would cause a wineskin to stretch. New wineskins haven't been stretched yet, so they can support the stretching caused by the fermenting process. Old wineskins, however, having already been stretched, would burst by the fermenting process of new wine. So Jesus says it would be inappropriate to put new wine in old wineskins. Instead the solution he proposes is to use new wineskins for new wine.

These two parables raise the subject of appropriateness. Jesus makes clear that certain behavior is not appropriate. But notice the nuance of these parables. The appropriateness in these parables is in light of the newness. New cloth is inappropriate for an old garment. New wine is inappropriate for old wineskins. New cloth is for new garments. New wine is for new wineskins. The appropriateness of certain behavior is defined by the newness. That is Jesus' point.

Clearly Jesus' point here applies to how the Pharisees were evaluating the appropriateness of his actions versus how Jesus was evaluating them. Jesus' evaluation was in light of something new; in light of the good news of the coming kingdom of God. Jesus' point to the Pharisees is that they must reassess what is appropriate in light of who Jesus is and the kingdom which he brings. The Pharisees were like the ones with the old garments and the old wineskins. They evaluated things from their old perspectives, from their time-honored traditions of men, from their legalistic Pharisaical mindset, from their self-righteous, self-justifying, place of privilege. Instead Jesus was bringing the new cloth and new wine, so to speak. In response, the people had to reevaluate their understanding of what is appropriate or not. They even needed to reevaluate their understanding of God's laws and make sure their interpretations were consistent with this new revelation from God, to make sure they understood Scripture from the vantage point of having seen the Messiah who had come to describe the coming kingdom in greater clarity. To put it in terms of the parables, the right response to Jesus bringing new cloth and new wine, was to make new clothes and use new wineskins.

As we have been looking at Mark, we have already been seeing some of the newness of the kingdom which Jesus is bringing. We saw that two weeks ago, in how Jesus fulfilled the OT ceremonial laws, signaled by the cleansing of the leper. We saw that last week, in how Jesus declared by his own authority the forgiveness of sins. We see the newness of the kingdom declared here by Jesus in these two parables today. And we even see the newness of the kingdom foreshadowed here in our passage today. We see the good news of the forgiveness of sins foreshadowed here, and it marvelously ties together this whole passage. This is found in verse 20. Jesus says in verse 20, "But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day." You might have noticed that the NKJV says "they will fast in those days", days being plural. But the actual Greek text has the word "day" as singular, "they will fast in *that* day," which is how the ESV, NIV, NASB, and other translate it. Surely the people at the time would not have known what Jesus was alluding to. And yet, we as the church who has witnessed the cross -- we recognize this as a reference to the cross. When Jesus, the bridegroom, is at the cross, when he has been taken away from his disciples, then they will fast.

Interestingly, this speaks of a sort of Old Testament fulfillment. Recall that the only fasting mandated in the Old Testament was on the Day of Atonement. Here Jesus says, on "that day", his disciples will fast. Do you see the connection? That day, the day of the cross, is the true Day of Atonement, the day which the Day of Atonement looked forward to. The day when the true atonement would be offered up

for God's people. The day that showed the failure of all the blood of bulls and goats, futile to truly atone for God's people. That day his disciples would fast. That day -- when Jesus blood would atone for the sins of his people. And so the OT Day of Atonement looked forward to the day of the cross where Jesus' shed blood would atone for the sins of his people. His shed blood would secure the very forgiveness of sins which is announced by Jesus with the coming of the kingdom!

Saints of God, do you see it? This is the foundation for what makes Jesus' actions in this passage appropriate! Jesus' actions in this passage are only appropriate because of the forgiveness of sins which he would secure at the cross! If Jesus did not have forgiveness to offer, then why should he eat and drink with sinners and tax collectors - he would have no forgiveness to offer them, no forgiveness to call them to, he would be no physician because he could not heal them or help them. If Jesus did not have forgiveness to offer, then why should his disciples not fast? If Jesus did not bring his disciples the good news of forgiveness of sins, then they surely should fast. They would have no reason to rejoice, no reason to celebrate for they would be under God's condemnation with the fires of hell as the imminent threat.

But Jesus has secured forgiveness of sins on the cross, making his actions in our passage appropriate. He has secured forgiveness for the sinners whom he calls. He has secured forgiveness for the disciples with whom he celebrates! And so think about what we see Jesus and his followers doing here in this passage. They are eating and drinking. They are feasting and celebrating. This is a beautiful picture of the benefit of forgiveness. We who are recipients of the forgiveness of sins offered by Christ are those who will eternally feast with Christ. We are those who have been invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb. Notice even the imagery in this passage: wedding imagery, new cloth, new wine, all imagery that points to celebration! We are those who Scripture promises an eternal banquet with our Lord. That is why Jesus says in Revelation 3:20, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.

This is our eternal hope! And we have a foretaste of it even today as we come to the table of the Lord. Even today we eat and drink with the Lord and with his people.

And so as a Christian, as a sinner who has received the forgiveness by faith in Christ, how do you judge what is appropriate? How do you judge what is appropriate for Christian living? Do you judge what is appropriate by your own standards? By your own preferences and prerogatives? We must not. We must judge what is appropriate by taking on Christ's standards. Christ must tell us what is appropriate for our living as Christians. And he has told us this in his Holy Word.

And so do we dare not find it appropriate to go to those who are sick around us? Do we look at those in Marin and say, I am glad I am not a sinner like them, who trust in their own affluence and success? Or do we take the compassion of Christ and go to those in Marin, calling them to repentance, because we too are sinners who have been forgiven? That is surely appropriate. It would be inappropriate not to go to those who are sick when we have found the cure!

And we rejoice, because we know that the cure is not of ourselves. Rather, we have received the cure that comes only in Christ; in the forgiveness of sins that he has secured for us on the cross. And so let us rejoice! Let us celebrate! Let us thank the Lord all our days, as we look forward to when the bridegroom will return and will once again be with us, not just by his Spirit, but even physically, when

we will see him face to face, celebrating and feasting together for all eternity.
Amen.

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