

QUANTOCK MINISTRIES

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*A Bible teaching and preaching ministry
for the Christian community*

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MARK 2 v 13 – 22

Exegesis

V13 – 14. It appears that Jesus was teaching as He walked along, probably gently and surrounded by the crowd on the stony foreshore of Galilee. This reminds us that as we walk along on the journey of life, the Lord is teaching us through our experiences, each step of the way. Levi (Matthew) as a tax-collector would have been a despised figure by his fellow countrymen, as he was working for the hated Romans via the local tetrarch (Herod). He would also have been unscrupulous in the amount of commission he demanded from people when collecting taxes. However, he didn't need asking twice to follow Jesus, and this is an example to us today to heed the call to follow Him and respond immediately.

V15 - 17. Matthew instinctively invited all the friends in his circles to a huge banquet at his home (Luke 5 v 29), to meet Jesus and to celebrate his own "conversion". Such people were held in contempt by the religious leaders, who regarded them as "sinners". These leaders, ever snooping around, asked the disciples why Jesus lowered Himself to associate and eat with such people. It was Jesus who answered them, pointing out that if the Pharisees were so perfect (self-righteous), surely it was only to be expected that God would seek those who were not so "fortunate"!

V18 – 20. The rest of the passage seems to be describing a separate occasion. Here Jesus is asked about the ritual of fasting engaged in by the disciples of the Pharisees and of John the Baptist. These rituals were not part of the Law of Moses (that had only stipulated fasting on the Feast of Atonement) and had become a major and very public element of being "religious". In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6 v 16 – 18) Jesus sanctions but does not demand fasting and describes the practice as a very private matter between each Christian and God. In this instance there was no need for even that, because He, the Bridegroom, was with them. If and when they did fast, it would be because of their sadness at His absence.

V21 – 22. Jesus moves on to the central point of the whole passage; He has come to inaugurate a new era in human history, the Age of Grace, or the Church Age, and it cannot be grafted on to the old legalistic and ritualistic Judaism that surrounded them at that time. Isaiah 43 v 18 – 19.

Application

1. These verses help to describe the vast changes God was bringing about at the time, to be fully implemented on the Day of Pentecost, following Calvary and the Resurrection. The old age of grace through the Law was to be swept aside, together with all the corruption that had erroneously been added to it. We have passed through amazing times in our day, including a 70-year period of unparalleled advance in world conditions from Israel's return in 1948 to 2018, including science, wealth, medicine, communications, comparative peace, commerce, democracy, etc. – all accompanied by the greatest age of evangelism in the history of the Church. Suddenly these benefits appear to be coming to an end with virus pandemics, climate change, population explosion, political conflict, social media, artificial intelligence, unspeakable weapons, economic collapse, etc. Our understanding of scripture leads us to see that with these "signs of the times" we are almost certainly nearing the end of the Church Age, and like those first disciples we need to hear what the Lord is saying to His people "for such a time as this". We will not and cannot go back to the old ways of activity which we had before Covid-19. Now the call is to individual Christians to allow the Holy Spirit to use them in their own circumstances to be His influence for conviction of "sin, righteousness and judgement" (John 16 v 8).

2. The conflict in religion was between legalism and redemption, and Jesus was totally committed to demonstrating that distinction. In the days of the early Church, Paul had exactly the same battle to fight, even against Peter, and the letter to the Galatian churches is fully dealing with this conflict. Sadly, the history of the Church shows that religious dogma, legalism, dependence on good works, self-righteousness, and unbiblical structures are still predominant, throughout the denominations, even in evangelical and non-conformist fellowships. Also, the major feature of all false religions and philosophies is a requirement for legalistic behaviour under a strong control, often with harsh sanctions for non-compliance. John 8 v 26, Galatians 5 v 1.

3. This previous lesson helps to explain why Jesus was so unacceptable to the religious leaders of the day. The whole nation was on high alert for the coming of the expected Christ (or Messiah) at that time, based on Daniel's timetable. However, from his earliest teaching, especially in the Sermon on the Mount, and through His lack of conformity to their false additions to the original Law of Moses, the Sanhedrin could not accept that Jesus was the genuine Messiah; He was "not one of them". He didn't even come from an acceptable locality – the accursed Nazareth in the "Galilee of the Gentiles" region. The amazing truth is that the ordinary people recognised His messianic credentials long before the authorities. Such a person was Levi, who obviously was just waiting for the One who would bring him personal redemption, instead of judgement and condemnation.