

MARK 2:18 – 3:6

^{2:18} Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. 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?” ¹⁹ And Jesus said to them, “Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. ²⁰ The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day. 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. 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.” ²³ One Sabbath he was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. ²⁴ And the Pharisees were saying to him, “Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?” ²⁵ And he said to them, “Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: ²⁶ how he entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar the high

priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?”²⁷ And he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.”²⁸ So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.”^{3:1} Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there with a withered hand.² And they watched Jesus, to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him.³ And he said to the man with the withered hand, “Come here.”⁴ And he said to them, “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?” But they were silent.⁵ And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.⁶ The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

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Take time to read the passage carefully for yourself. Notice and mark down its structure, repeated words, key movements, and anything that stands out or raises questions. The questions below are offered as tools to help you notice, reflect, and respond to the text—use those that are most helpful for you or your group.

EXPLORING THE PASSAGE

- This passage contains three connected scenes, each centered around a question asked of Jesus.
 - What is the question being asked in each section? Why is each question being raised? What problem are they addressing, and why is it important to them? (What do we know about fasting and Sabbath practices in that time?)
 - How do these questions compare with one another? What progression do you see in those asking Jesus?
 - How is the final scene different from the first two? What has led to this change?
- In the first scene, Jesus is asked about fasting.
 - How does Jesus' image of a wedding help answer their question?
 - What do the parables of the cloth and the wineskins add to His answer? What is the problem with trying to combine the old and the new ways?
 - What invitation is Jesus giving to those listening? What response is He calling them to?
 - How has the theme of "new" and "old" already begun to develop in Mark's Gospel?
 - Jesus refers to Himself as the bridegroom. What would this image communicate to His listeners, especially in light of the Old Testament?
- In the second scene, the question shifts to the Sabbath.
 - How does Jesus' reference to David answer their accusation? What does this story reveal about God and the Law?
 - What does Jesus mean when He says, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath"?
 - What does His claim to be the "Lord of the Sabbath" reveal about Him?
- In the final scene, the conflict reaches its climax.
 - Why does Jesus bring the man into the center and act publicly?
 - Jesus responds with both anger and grief. What has caused this reaction? What does this reveal about Him and about the condition of their hearts?
 - What is significant about the alliance between the Pharisees and the Herodians? Why is this surprising?
- Looking at the passage as a whole: How would you describe or define "hardness of heart" based on this passage? What causes it? What are its results?
- Summary:
 - What do we learn about Jesus, the gospel, and the Kingdom of God in this passage?
 - What do we learn about the human heart and the danger of hardness of heart?
 - In one or two sentences, summarize the main point of this passage. What is God's word for you from this passage? How will you respond?

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

- Where might your heart be becoming less open or less sensitive to Him? What would it look like to respond to Him more honestly or quickly?
- How are you currently practicing spiritual disciplines in your life? In what ways might these practices be helping—or hindering—your relationship with God?
- Which aspect of Jesus' identity in this passage do you most need to see or trust right now? Where do you need His restoration, leadership, or grace in your life?
- Where might you be hearing Jesus' words but not yet responding to Him? What would it look like for you to repent and believe in a specific area of your life right now?