

**Rising hostility**

These verses continue the account of rising hostility against Jesus. A question about fasting is answered<sup>☞1</sup>, the disciples pluck grain on the Sabbath<sup>☞2</sup> and Jesus heals a man on the Sabbath<sup>☞3</sup>.

☞1 2:18–22

☞2 2:23–28

☞3 3:1–6

Ancient writers were not as bothered as we are about strictly chronological sequences, yet there is reason to believe that Mark generally tells events in sequence. It is only he who tells the events of a 24-hour period<sup>☞1</sup> in chronological order. And if, as I believe, Mark 2:1–3:6 tells the story of **rising** opposition, then the stories must either be in sequence or must be a string of incidents from approximately the same time.

☞1 in Mark 1:21–39

**1. A New Move in the Kingdom of God**

**1. It was becoming clear that Jesus' ministry was a new move in the kingdom of God.** The question about fasting<sup>☞1</sup> arose because it was becoming clear that Jesus' disciples were a distinct group. For Jesus, fasting was good<sup>☞2</sup> but it was not a rigid law. People were surprised that Jesus' disciples did **not** fast. The disciples of John had a routine of fasting. And the Pharisees – most of them unsaved people – had a routine of fasting. At this time Jesus' disciples were not doing any fasting. It led to a question.

☞1 2:18–22

☞2 see Matthew 6:16

• A question about fasting

• Fasting is not for times of celebration

'They came'<sup>☞1</sup> is a vague phrase. It seems to mean that people in general were asking a question about fasting. For Jesus fasting was for special occasions and special crises. One did not fast during **enjoyable** times, and He viewed His ministry as a time of great joy. While the bridegroom is with his friends at a wedding, it is a time of celebration. His close friends are busy assisting the bridegroom and they need to eat<sup>☞2</sup>! Jesus viewed His ministry in that way. It was a time of celebration! The kingdom had come in Jesus. There was much spreading of the good news to be done. It was not the time to be fasting. One day, after the death and resurrection of Jesus, 'after the bridegroom is taken from them', there will be tough times in the story of the church; then they will need to fast<sup>☞3</sup>.

☞1 2:18

☞2 2:19

☞3 2:20

• New movements – new structures

For the moment, Jesus was not just following John the Baptist or the Pharisees. The 'Jesus-movement' that was coming into Israel at that time was not just a new patch on the old ministry of John the Baptist or the Pharisees; it was a new movement in the kingdom of God altogether, and Jesus was doing some new things<sup>☞1</sup>. 'New wine requires new wineskins'<sup>☞2</sup>. New movements in the kingdom of God need new structures.

☞1 2:21

☞2 2:22

**2. The New Kingdom is a gracious kingdom**

**2. God's new kingdom was more gracious than legalistic<sup>☞1</sup>.** The next event must have taken place somewhere in the early stages of Jesus' ministry. Mark shows how opposition arose through a series of events; the stories are being told at least roughly in chronological order.

☞1 2:23-28

• 'Working' on the Sabbath! – A complaint

Something happened on a Saturday, the Sabbath day. Jesus and His disciples were taking a walk. It could not have been more than a short stroll since to walk more than a 'Sabbath day's journey' was forbidden by the law and Jesus is not accused of walking too far. They are plucking grain to chew it as they walk along. Some Pharisees were nearby (perhaps this took place near a synagogue where He and His disciples had been for Sabbath worship). They complain that Jesus is 'working' on the Sabbath!

• David's 'illegal' act

Jesus could have said that He was not breaking the Old Testament requirement, but only breaking their **additional** tradition. What He actually did, was refer to a story where David did something that was forbidden altogether! Although He was not actually breaking the law, He spoke as though it would not have mattered very much if He did! David acted illegally when he helped himself to the consecrated bread at Nob<sup>☞1</sup>. Ritual law can be broken when necessary.

☞1 See 1 Samuel 21:1–6

• **God's law – beneficial not restrictive**

Jesus said: 'the Sabbath was made for man'. Any way of taking the Sabbath-regulation of the Old Testament which makes it a perversely restrictive regulation has missed the point of the Old Testament law. God's law was beneficial; it was not ruthlessly harsh so as to restrict even a stroll and a snack on a Saturday. Legalists do strange things. They take God's law, add to it, and then get so strict you cannot chew even a piece of grain! God's kingdom is not like that, although some make it that way!

• **Release from the Sabbath**

Jesus kept the law, but He never added to it and soon His death on the cross would bring release from the Sabbath altogether.

• **Son of Man**

In verse 28 Jesus redirects the conversation and points to Himself. He is the 'son of man'. The phrase can mean 'a mere human being'. The Sabbath is for human beings and Jesus is a human being! Yet at the same time, for those who have ears to hear, 'Son of Man' is a title referring to the Messiah of Daniel 7:13. The Sabbath law is His law! He can disregard it if He likes! His kingdom will soon come and dispense with such things. The Pharisees wanted to talk about law; Jesus wanted them to think about Himself as the Messiah! He was actually not breaking the Mosaic law but if He wanted to He would bring it to an end. He is Lord of the Mosaic law. He claims the authority to replace the Sabbath with Himself!

• **The Christian under Jesus – not the law**

After the death of Jesus and after Pentecost, the Christian is released from being under the law and is under Jesus. Jesus fulfilled the Mosaic law for us, and then puts us not under law but under Himself.

### 3. Grace and compassion

3. **Jesus made it clear that religion is cruel but grace is compassionate**<sup>1</sup>. There was another occasion when the keeping of the Sabbath was a matter of controversy. It must have been during the same stage of Jesus' ministry. He went into a synagogue on a Sabbath<sup>2</sup>. Jesus' enemies knew He often healed people, so they were watching to see whether He would heal someone on the Sabbath<sup>3</sup>. Jesus called the man forward<sup>4</sup> (3:3) and deliberately made the point that the Sabbath was never intended to be so restrictive as to stop the gracious and compassionate kingdom of God from going forward<sup>5</sup>! They had no answer but were not willing to change. He was angry and distressed at their callousness<sup>6</sup> and healed the man.

1 3:1-6

2 3:1

3 3:2

4 3:3

5 3:4

6 3:5

• **A man healed on the Sabbath**

• **Offended Pharisees begin to plot**

Mark 3:6 is the point that Mark has been leading us to. The Pharisees began to plot with the Herodians (of all people!) to kill Jesus. The Herodians did not care in the least about the Mosaic law. They were supporters of the Roman government. But the breaking of tradition offended the Pharisees so much that they did not care who they were involved with, if only they could get rid of Jesus. Religion is foolish, blind, even murderous. Jesus is merciful, compassionate, full of grace.



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