

## Gospel of Mark Chapter 2 - John Karmelich

1. Chapter 2 focuses on three specific miracles and four specific statements made by Jesus. Each of these "situations" have a purpose and understanding them is the key to the chapter.
  - a) The first significant statement of this chapter is when Jesus said, "But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins..." He said to the paralytic, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." (Chapter 2, Verses 10 and 11.)
    - i) The point here is through a miracle, Jesus shows He has the power to forgive sins and the miracle done at this moment was used to validate that fact.
  - b) The second significant statement is when Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." (Verse 17.)
    - i) Jesus at this point shared a meal with a group of tax collectors and "sinners". The term "sinners" refers to Jewish people who ignore the laws of Moses. Jesus then made the statement that he came to call sinners to repentance. Yes, everyone is a sinner, but the point is Jesus calls those who realize they are sinners and are willing to change their lives to follow Him.
  - c) The third significant statement is when Jesus said "And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, he pours new wine into new wineskins." (Verse 22.)
    - i) This is meant to be a metaphor and is not literally about wine and wineskins. The point is Jesus came to do something new. The "new" is to teach the world that He is going to pay the price for sins, and sacrifices to God will no longer be needed. Jesus is the "new wine" and that "new wine" won't work with "old wineskins".
  - d) Here is the fourth and final key point of this chapter: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath." (Verses 27-28.)
    - i) The point here is Jesus is claiming that He is in charge of rules of observing the Sabbath. The word Sabbath means rest. The idea is not about sleep, but about stopping from work to take time to honor God. The point here is that if Jesus is saying He is in charge of the Sabbath, then that means He is God and He is in charge of knowing what is God's desire for in order to be pleasing to Him.
  - e) So what do these points have in common? Together, they show the purpose of Jesus coming. (By the way, that's my lesson title, the idea of understanding Jesus' purpose.)
    - i) In other words, Jesus didn't come to earth just to perform a bunch of miracles and make some selected people feel better. He came to show that He is God, He is in charge and most importantly, He is the way to salvation. These statements as outlined in this chapter are a good summary of Jesus' purpose for coming.
2. OK, let's say we know all of this. We understand that Jesus came for the forgiveness of sins and we understand that following Jesus is the way to eternal life. Now what? What are we suppose to get out of this lesson other than just knowing the basic's of who is Jesus?
  - a) The real question is what are we doing (or not doing) about that belief in Jesus? We may understand that Jesus came to help sinners and understand that Jesus is in charge of the "rules" of worshipping God as He is God. What does that mean we do about it on a practical basis? To answer that, let's go back to my opening four statements:
    - i) The first one is about trusting in Jesus that our sins are forgiven. If that is true, why do we feel guilty about what we have done wrong (and confessed to God)? The point is if God has forgiven us, why haven't we forgiven ourselves.
    - ii) If God is perfect, then God knows all things, past, present and future. If we sin tomorrow, it may be a shock to us, but it is not to God. He was aware of all of our sins before we ever gave our lives to Him.

- iii) Yet despite that "head knowledge", we still carry around guilt for sins we have committed and assumedly confessed to God. The point is if God is willing to forgive us, why aren't we willing to forgive ourselves?
  - iv) The problem is we think we are better than we really are. We hold ourselves to too high of a standard in which we think we should be better than how we are.
    - a) If we believe God has forgiven us, why do we still hold on to the guilt associated with that sin?
  - v) There is one more related point: If we are instantly forgiven when we confess our sins, why should we avoid sin in the first place? The Book of Romans spends time on this, but in summary, if we are now living for God, we still should make every effort to please Him with our lives. That means we do work to avoid any and all sins and when we become aware of them, we give them to God.
  - b) This leads to the second key point of this lesson: (The good news is my explanation of the last three points are much shorter. ☺) It is that Jesus came to call sinners to repentance.
    - i) In this point, Jesus was eating with a group of tax collectors and "sinners". Jesus said He came to call sinners to repentance. In order to repent, we need to acknowledge that we are sinners in the first place.
    - ii) Just by asking for forgiveness, we are eternally forgiven of all sins we have committed, past, present and future. To receive that forgiveness, we must realize that we are sinners in the first place. Further, we must be aware of the fact that even as saved believers, we still do things that displease God and we must confess and turn from such sins as we become aware of them.
    - iii) To be aware of our sins, doesn't mean we have to walk around all day being depressed and downhearted. It just means that one takes regular time to think about ways we are displeasing to God, and confess those sins to God.
    - iv) Then comes the good news: We are forgiven. Again, if we can accept the fact that God has forgiven us, why do we carry around guilt about what we have done? Yes we can fear what others might think of us, but if God can and does forgive us, why should we worry about what others think? Further, the only way to deal with the fear of what others might think, is to let God help us through those fears.
  - c) The third point Jesus made is a metaphor with the expression, "new wine in new wineskins". The idea behind that is to follow Jesus is a "new way of doing things", and we again, need to regularly examine our lives to eliminate our old ways of doing things. In other words, in order to live the "new life in Jesus", we must constantly work to eliminate our old sinful ways from constantly wanting to creep back into our lives.
  - d) The final point of this chapter is essentially, "God is in charge". The actual text makes the point that Jesus is in charge of the Sabbath, which refers to the rules of how we are to rest in God. The bigger picture idea that goes along with that, it is the idea that God is in charge. If that is true, why are we worried about trying to please Him? If we are forgiven, why do we worry about the sins we have committed? The point is we are to confess them and then forgive ourselves as God has already forgiven us.
3. What I am getting at, is the idea of letting go of guilt. That is really what the "good news" of the Gospel message is all about. If we believe Jesus is God, and if we believe God has forgiven us of our sins, then why do we still carry around the guilt of what we did wrong?
- a) I could give all of us a lecture here on the danger of guilt. A guilty conscious does a lot of physical damage to the human body. Most of us are aware of that issue, so I won't go into a lot of depth at this point.
  - b) This leads to the related issue of guilt that we all deal with: What if others around us find out what I am doing wrong? How do I ever explain to those around me of my secret sin of (fill in the blank)?

- i) In order to protect those relationships, first we must give them to God. Not only do we ask Him to forgive us of sin, but we can (and should) ask for His help in actually dealing with and facing that issue so that it no longer is an issue.
    - a) God then gives us the strength to deal with our issues even when it comes to dealing with those issues and those people who are close to us.
  - ii) The secret to dealing with sins and other people's reaction to sin is to pray for God's help in dealing with that situation. I find that God gives us the strength and courage to help us with that issue when we have to deal with other people. One needs to pray for God's help in dealing in such issues with others. We may not get the answer we want in prayer, but what we do get is God working it out His way.
  - iii) Personally, the greatest victories I have had over sin issues in my life involve when I truly give every aspect of that sin and its root cause to God and then let Him work on His timing to overcome and end that issue.
- c) OK, with that guilt ridden introduction out of my system, ☺ let's start Verse 1 and I'll continue this issue as it relates to each of the key stories in this chapter.
4. Chapter 2, Verse 1: A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home.
- a) To understand this verse, one has to go back and understand what was happening in the latter verses in Chapter 1. Jesus started His ministry work in a town called Capernaum. Instead of just staying there and curing whatever ails everyone who asks, Jesus makes the decision to go to other towns to also spread the word of who He was.
  - b) What we learn here in Verse 1 is that Jesus considered Capernaum His home base of operations and after traveling from town to town, Jesus is now back at Capernaum.
  - c) The problem was when Jesus left that town, everybody who had any sort of issue (that's everybody) was trying to touch Jesus to get healing. Now that Jesus is back in town, word spread quickly that He is back, and I suspect the mob that was surrounding Jesus before He left is now surrounding Him again now that He is back.
5. Verse 2: So many gathered that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them.
- a) Jesus is now preaching at some house, probably the place where he was staying which we learned in Chapter 1, was Peter's house.
  - b) The point is wherever Jesus was, a huge mob was there to hear him. The house was so filled with people, that no one else could get in or even look in a window.
  - c) So were the crowds there to hear him preach or to see miracles? I would argue at this point that they were mainly interested in the miracles. As Jesus is just "standing there preaching", the audience would all listen in, to see what He has to say and what He does.
    - i) Let's face it, if somebody in our town was curing everybody in sight of whatever disease or issue they had, we would be listening to what that person has to say.
    - ii) In other words, miracles are a way of drawing a large crowd. In order to get people to listen to His message, He needed to draw a crowd to Himself.
    - iii) Chapter 1 implied how Jesus' words convicted people. That was the statement of how when Jesus spoke, He didn't quote famous people, but spoke with His own authority. My point is people were willing to listen to what Jesus had to say.
  - d) So here was this gathering at a house in Capernaum, (probably Peter's house) where it was so crowded, no one else could get in and even every door and window was filled with people who want to watch.
  - e) Finally, note the expression "preached the word". That is a metaphor for preaching the purpose of Jesus coming into the world: To teach the world that He is God and He alone is the only way to approach God by accepting His payment for the forgiveness of sins.
  - f) With all of that said, we can now continue the story.

6. Verse 3: Some men came, bringing to him a paralytic, carried by four of them.
- a) A paralytic is a person who has cannot use their muscles. People who are required to use a wheelchair are usually paralytics, as they can't move the lower parts of their bodies. Somebody who is fully paralyzed can't move anything at all on their body.
  - b) The exact physical state of this guy carried by four others is not known. My point is I don't know if he was stricken from the waist down or the entire body. In order for the person to get from "Point A to Point B", he had to be carried by others.
  - c) So why bring this guy to Jesus? Apparently the four friends thought, "Well, we have seen and heard of the miracles Jesus has done. Maybe he can help our paralytic friend as well."
    - i) A point here is that the faith of the four "carriers" is an issue as well as the faith of the one who is actually a paralytic.
  - d) Now comes the problem of how do the four "carriers" actually get the man to Jesus. The house is so crowded that no one can even get close to Him.
  - e) Most veteran Christians know this story well. It is the story of the man who was lowered through the ceiling so Jesus can heal him. To me, the most impressive part of the story has always been the engineering effort it must have taken in order to pull this off.
    - i) The paralytic was lowered by ropes to where Jesus was standing. Where did the four guys get the rope? How did they know Jesus exact spot in the house?
    - ii) My point is the effort it took to pull off this event is an impressive feat of engineering all unto itself.
7. Verse 4: Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus and, after digging through it, lowered the mat the paralyzed man was lying on.  
<sup>5</sup>When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."
- a) In order to explain this, first I need to talk a little about houses in that area in that culture. Remember Israel is a hot desert climate. Houses were built with flat roofs where one can walk on the roof. The houses were designed so that when the weather was hot, people could spend time on the roof. It was common to have exterior stairwells leading to the roof. These roofs were made of a clay substance and then a sealant was added.
    - i) Therefore, the four men carrying the paralytic probably had a stairwell access to the roof and then they physically dug a hole in the roof so they could lower then paralytic through the hole via some ropes.
  - b) With that said, notice in Verse 5, Jesus says He saw "their faith". In other words, Jesus commented on the faith of the four men carrying the paralytic to make this effort.
    - i) Remember the house was crowded with people. I'm guessing some of the roof fell on the heads of Jesus and people close to Him. As the paralytic was lowered, Jesus could probably see the four men who lowered the paralytic into the room.
  - c) The first thing Jesus said to the paralytic is "your sins are forgiven". I'm sure the first thing the paralytic wanted to here is "Help me get out of this condition". Instead he got a statement from Jesus that his sins were forgiven.
    - i) Two views on this: The first is Jesus could have been speaking "generically" how all of us are sinners. Jesus is then saying to the man "His sins are forgiven" based on the fact that all of us are sinners.
    - ii) The second view is in that culture, when one is in a paralytic state, people thought it was due to some sin in the paralytic's life. Whether or not this guy had committed some sort of sin to get that way, the point is that culture thought of that condition as sin-induced. With Jesus saying, "Your sins are forgiven", he is telling the man that he no longer has to worry about any sin.
    - iii) The important point is that everyone in that room heard Jesus make the statement to that man that "His sins were forgiven". Jesus was referring to the fact that this man had enough faith to believe in Jesus and believe what Jesus was teaching about His upcoming death as payment for sins.

8. Verse 6: Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, <sup>7</sup>"Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"
- a) There is a classic joke among bible teachers that the Jewish religious leaders have an important ministry in the bible for Christians. The joke is, it is their job to tell us when Jesus said something really important. Here they object to Jesus statement about the forgiveness of sins. The Jewish teachers correctly say that only God has the power to forgive sins. The point of this little joke is that whenever the Jewish teachers make a statement like this, go back and look what Jesus did say, as it was something important.
  - b) The other point of this statement is that the religious leaders were right. Only God can forgive sins. The idea of sin is to do something displeasing to God. Therefore, if we have offended God by sinning, it is up to God, and no one else to grant forgiveness.
  - c) My point here is that if Jesus does have the power to say, "your sins are forgiven", the only way Jesus could have that power is if He is God Himself. That is a key point here, that Jesus has the power to relieve our guilt with God simply by knowing the fact that God can and does forgive our sins and Jesus has the power to grant forgiveness.
9. Verse 8: Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, "Why are you thinking these things? <sup>9</sup>Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? <sup>10</sup>But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...." He said to the paralytic, <sup>11</sup>"I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." <sup>12</sup>He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"
- a) Jesus followed up his statement of "Your sins are forgiven" with another statement in Verse 9, where Jesus said, "Take up your mat and walk".
    - i) An underlying point of those two statements is anyone could say out loud the words to either of those two statements, but one would need to see evidence in order to validate whether or not Jesus had the power to make those statements.
  - b) Let me put this another way. If God said to someone "Your sins are forgiven", does that person immediately "glow" sinless? The answer is no. Therefore, there is no way to give any physical evidence that this man's sins are forgiven. Therefore, Jesus follows up that statement about forgiveness with the statement about "take up your bed and walk". The point is people could see if Jesus had the power to make the second statement about walking if that person could then get up and walk away.
  - c) The fact the paralytic did get out of his cot and walk around did validate the fact that Jesus had the power to perform miracles and people responded to His words. What Jesus was trying to teach this crowd is that if we believe Jesus could make a paralytic get up and walk, then we should also believe His statement about how He can forgive sins.
  - d) I am also fascinated by Jesus statement to the man to "take up his mat and go home". There is nothing more Jesus can do for the guy now, so he should go home. It doesn't mean Jesus is done with this man for life. It just means Jesus is done "curing" him.
  - e) OK John, I know this story and I believe Jesus has the power to forgive sins. How does that affect my daily walk with Jesus? The answer is to not "wallow" in our sins, but to give them to God and let go of those sins. As I stated in the introduction, the biggest problem people have with sins is not that God can forgive them, but we don't forgive ourselves. We think we should be "better than we really are" and we don't forgive ourselves. Learning to let go of our sins does begin with the faith that God can and does forgive all sins we confess to Him. Which is the point of this story.
  - f) This story ends with the crowd being amazed how the paralytic could get up and walk away. Jesus wanted the crowd to think about His statement that He had the power to forgive sins. Yes, it is difficult to accept the idea that believing in one man as God and that man can forgive sins, but that is what God is asking all of us to believe.

10. Verse 13: Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. <sup>14</sup>As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him.
- a) Let's start with geography. Jesus was in the town of Capernaum. This town existed near the Sea of Galilee, which is actually a lake. Therefore when the text says "Jesus went out besides the lake", Jesus was not going far from where he was staying in the last story.
  - b) As usual at this point, a large crowd gathered. I'm sure more people wanted to be healed. The crowd was willing to listen to Jesus preach as they wanted to "see something". It was at this point that Jesus saw Levi and called him to be a disciple.
  - c) We learn in the next chapter that Levi is another name for Matthew. (See Mark 3:18.) This man Levi (Matthew) became one of the twelve disciples.
  - d) It's time for a brief lesson on tax collectors. These guys are not popular today and I'm sure it was no better in that day. It was worse in that the taxes were to a foreign government and paying those taxes reminded everyone of the oppression of the Romans.
    - i) Roman tax collectors bought (bided for and won) specific territories. For example, a tax collector might say in effect, I bid \$1,000 dollars to tax people near the Sea of Galilee. Another person bids \$2,000. The highest bid was then responsible for collecting that amount of taxes in that territory. Any money the tax collectors got over and above their winning bid, they could then keep. Therefore, there was a financial incentive to collect as much as possible from the local residents.
    - ii) The tax collectors were looked upon as traitors because they supported the Roman government and not their own people. You can imagine the reaction of the other disciples when Jesus first called a tax collector to join the group!
  - e) Therefore, when Jesus called Levi (Matthew), it is a big deal in that Levi agreed to give up his way of life to follow Jesus. Understand that there is no "turning back" once Levi has given his lifestyle of being an oppressive tax collector in order to follow Jesus.
    - i) That alone is a good lesson. If we live to primarily make lots of money, we can possibly live a very good life here on earth, but that is all the eternal reward we will get. On the other hand, if we are willing to give up our life on this earth for the sake of Jesus, we have eternal rewards that are far greater than any and all riches we can accumulate in this lifetime.
    - ii) As I've stated in the past, that does not mean we take a vow of poverty. It does mean that everything we own now belong to God. We need to be responsible stewards of the resources He has provided for us.
  - f) Meanwhile, we last left Jesus dealing with Levi.
11. Verse 15: While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. <sup>16</sup>When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the "sinners" and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?"
- a) As I've stated earlier in this lesson, the Pharisees have a "ministry": It is their job to tell us when Jesus said something significant. Here, the Pharisee's are complaining that Jesus was eating with tax collectors and "sinners".
  - b) Let me define sinners here as the Pharisee's meant it. The Pharisees did not believe they were perfect or that people could be without sin. The specific term "sinners" here refers to Jewish people who have no regard for the laws of Moses. It would be like someone from a Christian background who has no interest in trying to please God with their life. That is what the Pharisee's meant by "sinners" here.
  - c) Meanwhile here is this meal at Levi's house. Many suspect this is a "goodbye dinner" as Levi was now leaving the profession. Levi (Matthew) was saying goodbye to the only friends he had (tax collectors and "sinners") and Levi introduced them to Jesus.

- d) This text indirectly gets into the issue of how do Christians "interface" with nonbelievers. There are principals in both the Old and New Testament about separating ourselves as believers from non-believers. (Examples: See Joshua 23:6-8, Acts 10:28, 1st Corinthians 5:11, 2nd Thessalonians 3:14). So is it proper for Jesus to eat with these people or not?
- i) The short answer for you and me is it depends upon how we act when gathering with nonbelievers. If we live our lives "pretty much" as they do and others cannot see any difference between their lives and our lives, then it is not appropriate.
  - ii) If however, when we gather with nonbelievers, people can still see that we are living for and making a difference for God, then that is acceptable. How do we do that? It may be a matter of saying no to drinking or going along with whatever is happening at that particular scene. The point is, it is not who we are "with" at any particular moment, but how we are acting. Our conduct should be consistent whether we are with a Christian group or a non-Christian group.
  - iii) One of the hardest things to do is "act like a Christian" in a non-Christian setting. It is tempting to want to go along with whatever is happening at that moment. Personally I have found word gets around fairly quickly among our friends how we have committed our lives to Christ. To me it is not so much having to say something (unless asked), but simply to make every effort to change one's behavior as to show that we are living differently.
  - iv) Let me put this another way: We should never be so "religious" as Christians that we refuse to associate with nonbelievers. At the same time, when we are around our nonbelieving friends and family, we need to act differently enough that people know that we have committed our lives to following God. It does not mean we get obnoxious or get "in people's faces". It does mean there is something about our behavior in those situations that separates ourselves from nonbelievers.
  - v) Which surprisingly, leads me back to the text.
12. Verse 17: On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."
- a) Let's remember what Jesus is reacting to: He is reacting to the statement by some Jewish teachers (in the previous verses) who said that Jesus should not be eating with "sinners". Again, the term sinners as used here refers to those who don't care about the laws of God.
  - b) Jesus then makes the statement about calling the righteous, which is Verse 17. Jesus point is not that He is a physical doctor, but that He is reaching out to those who realize they are sinners.
    - i) The people (or some of the people) at this gathering of tax collectors and "sinners" realize their lives are displeasing to God. In order for a person to come to Jesus for help, first they have to realize that they need help to begin with.
    - ii) The problem with the Pharisees is not that they failed to keep the Jewish laws, but they believed they were in good standing before God simply by keeping the law.
    - iii) The difference between the "sinners" and the Pharisees were that the "sinners" admitted that their lives were less than what God demanded. The Pharisees thought that due to their lifestyle, God was fully pleased with them.
    - iv) The problem with the Jewish religious life is that the confession of sins and animal sacrifices are only good until the next sin occurs. These rituals don't eliminate the "sin nature" within us. Jesus is trying to teach that by believing in His upcoming sacrifice for us, we can be cleansed of the sinful nature that we are born with.
    - v) Should we confess sins as we become aware of them? Of course. Still, we as "sinners" can live our lives with the confidence that we are eternally forgiven no matter how well or how bad we live out the rest of our lives as long as we are continually trusting in Jesus as God and as our complete payment of our sins.

- c) This leads me back to the issue of dealing with our own sins. Yes, asking Jesus to forgive our sins is a one time commitment. At the same time, we should keep on coming to Him as we need His strength in order to go through our life for Him. We need to ask for His strength in overcoming our own particular sin issues.
  - d) Suppose we say, "I'm now eternally forgiven of sins, now I can go live however I want". The question becomes, "Are you showing any gratitude to God for the forgiveness of all of our sins?" If we are not making any sort of effort to live differently, then we are not showing our gratitude to God for what He has done for us.
  - e) The idea of "dealing with our sins" is more than just confessing them to God, but that is a key first step and must never be ignored. As I've stated, the underlying issue is dealing with what is causing us to keep repeating the same sin. One of the reasons God calls us to spend time in prayer and examining our lives, is to think about the root cause of those sins and asking for God's help in dealing with those underlying issues. Without God's help, we are helpless to ever overcome such issues.
  - f) Meanwhile, Jesus is moving on to the issue of fasting.
13. Verse 18: Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. Some people came and asked Jesus, "How is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?"
- a) Let me start with the term "disciples of John". If you recall, John specifically pointed to Jesus and he said in effect, "this the guy I was talking about". The point as it relates here is that some of John's disciples didn't turn to Jesus but still followed John in the sense that they have confessed their sins and are now waiting for the Messiah to come.
    - i) In other words, not all disciples of John turned to Jesus. Some remained John's disciples. Given that, this verse mentions the "disciples of John" were now similar to the Pharisees in that they fasted regularly.
  - b) The idea of fasting is about avoiding food for a specific time period. A fast can refer to giving up all foods or it can refer to giving up specific foods. So what is the purpose of fasting? It is not about dieting. The best way I can describe the purpose of fasting is that it amplifies our prayers to God. A fast shows that God means more to us than food and we are willing to take time away from when we normally eat and give that time to God.
    - i) Getting back to the Jewish religion, the only time God literally called for a fast, is one day a year called "Yom Kippur". It is the 10th day of the 7th month on the Jewish calendar. (See Leviticus 23:29).
    - ii) The Pharisees took the idea of a fast, and turned it into a weekly, public ritual. They would fast twice a week. (See Luke 18:12). The idea is to show everyone around them how much more religious they are by their regular fasting.
    - iii) An underlying point that Jesus is going to make is there is a time and place for fasting, but now (when Jesus was on the earth) is not that time.
14. Verse 19: Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them. <sup>20</sup>But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast.
- a) It is important to grasp the idea that Jesus commonly speaks in illustrations and analogies that the local people would understand.
  - b) Jesus is saying a "wedding party" is not the time to fast. Jesus uses the illustration of a wedding to make the point that it is not the time to fast when Jesus is around.
  - c) To take that one step further, let me teach something from the "Talmud". This is not part of the bible, but a set of books that religious Jews use to teach how to obey God's laws. One of the rules in the Talmud is that at a wedding, Jews are free from all obligations of the law and their only job is to rejoice with the bride and bridegroom.
    - i) To put it in our vocabulary, when one is at a wedding, one should not stop to pray or fast for God by themselves. One should join in the happiness of the wedding.

- d) This leads us back to Verse 19. Jesus point is that He is like the bridegroom at a wedding. Jesus is encouraging everyone around Him to take advantage of the fact He is with them. After Jesus dies, then there will be times where we can fast.
- i) Notice that Jesus does not condemn the act of fasting. Jesus is only condemning the act of fasting at that moment in time. I do believe it is acceptable for Christians to fast, if they do it in the right frame of mind. Fasting is acceptable if one wants to show their loyalty to God as opposed to food. Further, fasting should always be done privately. (See Matthew 6:18.)
  - ii) Personally, I don't fast very much. I know others who do it more regularly. As long as one is not doing it to show their superiority to other people or fast in order to draw closer to God, it is fine. If one is doing it to "amplify" their prayer over a certain situation, I do believe there is benefit to that fast.
- e) Now here comes the key point about this topic, which is the next two verses.
15. Verse 21: "No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse. <sup>22</sup>And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, he pours new wine into new wineskins."
- a) Again, Jesus is talking in illustrations as opposed to being literal. Remember that the previous verses were about fasting and Jesus talked about "friends of the bridegroom." Now, Jesus talks about "unshrunk clothing on an old garment". The following sentence talks about old wine in old wineskins and new wine in new wineskins."
    - i) Before we get into the issue of what does all of this mean, don't forget to catch the simple idea that Jesus speaks in illustrations that people can relate too.
    - ii) For example, the last few verses focused on celebrating at a wedding. Just about any reader of any background can relate to the idea that when one goes to a wedding, the point is, it is a time of celebration and fasting is not appropriate.
    - iii) Jesus was using that illustration about being happy at a wedding to appreciate the time Jesus is with the disciples prior to the cross. After Jesus death and resurrection, then (i.e. now, for the last 2,000 years) it is appropriate to go back to our "normal" life and fasting when it is relevant to the situation at hand.
  - b) This leads us to the two new illustrations given in Verses 21 and 22. Both of them make the same point: You can't mix something old with something new.
    - i) Garments stretch over time. If you sew some unshrunk cloth on an old garment, to cover a hole, soon you will have another hole to deal with.
    - ii) The same idea with wine and "wineskins". Back then, wine was stored in animal skins. Over time, the skins with wine in them would stretch as the wine ferments. If one puts new wine in an old skin, it will tear the skin more to the point where the skin is now likely to break.
    - iii) Both illustrations make the same point: It is the danger of trying to mix something old with something new. The "new" will cause the "old" to break.
  - c) Now that we understand the background of these two illustrations, it is time to explain what they mean and how we apply them to our lives.
    - i) What Jesus meant is that the "Old Jewish Way" of approaching God through animal sacrifices is coming to an end. There is a "new way" of worshipping God in that one accepts Jesus sacrifice as the complete payment of sin.
    - ii) You have to admit, history has proved Jesus words to be true. There are billions who worship Jesus as God. Jesus "new way" has changed the world.
    - iii) Remember that Jesus is working with a Jewish audience. The book may be oriented to the non-Jewish reader, but Jesus is trying to convince a Jewish audience that the old way of worshipping God through temple sacrifices is coming to an end.

- iv) Since this book is written for a non-Jewish audience, let's discuss this from a non-Jewish perspective: The Romans believed in a multi-god system. Here is Jesus saying in effect (to that non-Jewish audience) that the old way of worshipping lots of gods is coming to an end, which it literally did over a several hundred year period. Christianity became the dominant religion in that culture.
  - v) My point is, the term "new way of doing things" is not just for the Jewish person, it is also for the non-Jewish person to realize that Jesus is God and the way to heaven is through the process of believing in Jesus' payment as our complete payment for our sins. The "Good News" of the Gospel is that one does not have to work to earn one's salvation. The price has been paid. One may do good things to show one's gratitude to God, but that is a separate issue from that of salvation itself.
  - d) There is one more point I need to make about the idea of the "new way" of doing things:
    - i) If one studies the history of Christianity (say, over the last few hundred years), one can see an obvious trend that God never works the same way twice.
    - ii) What I mean by that is that every great Christian "movement" never lasts more than one generation. For example, there was a time when each of the great Christian denominations were "dominant" in making a difference for Christ. For the last generation, the big movement of new converts are in nondenominational churches. I'm convinced the next great "movement" for Jesus will be through some other group that is not associated with any existing major church group.
    - iii) Does this mean that God no longer works through existing denominations or churches that have been established for awhile? Of course not. True Christians exist in most churches. I'm just pointing to where the largest crowds are gathering for Jesus at any one given time. Jesus principal of "new wine in new wineskins" also refers to the concept that whenever there is a new draw of people to Jesus Christ, it is always through a new group. (That is, a new denomination even though that group doesn't call themselves a denomination.)
    - iv) So what's the point of all of this? The answer changed my view on prayer a little. If one is praying for revival in a town, or state or country, be aware that God usually works through something "new" as opposed to reviving something old. It can mean a new pastor or a new church group. As history has taught us, every new revival that draws significant crowds for Jesus has always come through a "new movement of the Holy Spirit" as opposed to trying to revive an old one.
    - v) Again, I am in no way condemning existing churches and existing denominations. There are many individual denominational churches that have experienced long term growth despite that statement. God does and will continue to work wherever there are people who are following Him. My point here is that whenever the Christian church has seen a massive new growth in membership, it is usually through a "new movement" as opposed to reviving an existing movement.
  - e) OK, now that I've offended almost everyone, ☺ it's time for the last story of this chapter.
16. Verse 23: One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. <sup>24</sup>The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?"
- a) I need to start here by explaining about the Jewish welfare system as ordained in the bible. Jewish farmers were forbidden from cultivating their fields more than once per season. When the farmers collected their crop, they couldn't go back and see if they missed anything. Further, the "corners" of their fields were to be left alone. By leaving some food in the fields, those who didn't have any way of making a living could walk through these farm fields and eat at what was left. (See Leviticus 23:22).

- b) The problem wasn't the Jewish law, the problem was the Pharisee's interpretation of the Jewish law. (The Pharisee's were a religious sect in Israel.) The Pharisees were concerned with violations of the Sabbath. They determined that to take grain and separate the good (edible) part from the bad part was "working" and therefore, one was violating the Sabbath by going through the grain fields on the Sabbath (7th day) of the week.
    - i) The Pharisee's thought what Jesus and His disciples were doing was unlawful because they were "working" their food on the Sabbath day.
    - ii) Notice Jesus and His disciples didn't have the financial resources to buy food so they used this Levitical law in order to get food.
    - iii) Jesus responds to this charge by pointing out another supposed violation of God's laws" that was recorded in the Old Testament. This is the next verse:
17. Verse 25: He answered, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? <sup>26</sup>In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions."
- a) Remember that Jesus was accused by the religious Jews that He was breaking the Sabbath. The best way to defuse the situation is to point to a biblical example where something similar was done. Jesus started describing a biblical time (See 1st Samuel 21:4-6) where David took food that was only for the priests to eat.
    - i) The interesting thing is that if you read that story carefully, it says that David was given the bread on the day the bread was supposed to be changed. (See same passage as above). The law states the bread is to be changed once a week on the Sabbath. (See Leviticus 24:8). In other words, David ate this bread on the Sabbath.
    - ii) Was it a technical violation for David and his men to eat this bread? Yes in that it was God's intention to have the priests eat it. Was it commanded for the priests to eat the bread? No, but it is implied (Leviticus 24:9). The point is the priest in this story (in 1st Samuel) had compassion for David and his men, so the priest gave David the bread to eat.
    - iii) That's the point of how to observe the Sabbath. It is more important to have compassion for the suffering than it is worry about how to observe the Sabbath.
  - b) Also remember that Jesus understood about the requirement of keeping the Sabbath. If it was truly against the rules for the disciples to eat grain on this day, Jesus would not have permitted that action to happen. It was not a violation of God's ordination for the Sabbath for the hungry to eat wheat on that day. It was only a violation the Pharisee's interpretation of the Sabbath.
  - c) OK, just does all of this mean for us? We as Christians are not primarily focused on specific rules for keeping the Sabbath.
    - i) The lesson for Christians is to not be so focused on our rules, that we ignore having compassion on those in need. If we have certain "church denomination rules" and someone comes along who is truly in need, I believe it is ok to violate those rules in order to truly help that person.
    - ii) The point is not to be so bogged down in rules and regulations that we don't have compassion for those who are truly in need.
    - iii) In order to draw people to Christ, we need to show that we do care about them and about their needs. That should take priority over any conflict we have over our church's rules and regulations.
    - iv) Another way to look at this verse is to "not just care about the needs of other Christians, but to also see the needs of the community around us. If it is our goal to draw people to Christ, then "other people" need to see us making a difference in the world around us.

18. Verse 27: Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. <sup>28</sup>So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."
- a) Here is the final two verses of the chapter and the final "key point" (from Page 1) of this lesson. Jesus makes the statement (here in Verse 27) that "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath". What that statement means is that the purpose of the Sabbath is to rest from one's normal activities. What God intended by "rest" is to take some time out of one's week and use that time to focus on Him.
  - b) Do I think that Christians are required to keep the Sabbath? The New Testament teaches us in effect that "Some people treat one day as special and others treat every day alike". (See Romans 14:5). Paul goes on in that point to say in effect, "Let everyone (who is a Christian) decide for themselves what is appropriate to do as far as "resting in God".
    - i) For me, I don't go to work on Sundays and I go to church on that day. The point is I "rest" from my normal work-day activities. I don't do that to "gain points" with God or prove how good of a Christian I am. I do it, because I have learned that if I take one day a week off to rest from my normal activities, it keeps me close to God and also makes me a better person. To put it another way, one should go to church not because they have to, but because they want to worship God.
  - c) Which surprisingly, leads me back to the final verse. The last sentence says in effect that Jesus is the "God of the Sabbath". Yes, that is a claim that Jesus is God. More importantly, it is the understanding that it is Jesus that we worship on our times of rest.
    - i) Notice Jesus was not telling the Jewish people to violate the Sabbath. He is teaching them that they should take a day off from their normal activities and "rest in God" by spending time gathered with other believers and worshipping Him. I find that doing that as a regular habit makes one a better person. Do I have any hard and fast rules on how this day is to be observed. No I don't. It is going to be different for every person and if we feel another person isn't "resting in God", we should let God work on them as it is not our job to fix them.
  - d) My point is if Jesus is in charge of a "Sabbath rest from whatever we normally do", then we let God decide what is right for us and let God decide what is right for the person next to us. It is not up to us to make a bunch of rules saying how we (collectively) are to "Rest in God". That is the mistake the Pharisee's made. Jesus responds to that mistake by teaching us to trust in Him in terms of how to have "rest".
19. Let me sum up the lesson by going back to the "main points" as I stated in the introduction. The main ideas is that we are to accept the idea that Jesus has the power to forgive all of our sins once we confess those to Him. If God does forgive us, we then need to let go of those sins and forgive ourselves. We are to celebrate our time with Jesus and not try to impress Him with "religious acts" like fasting. Finally we are to rest in Him and let Him show us what is right for us in terms of resting.
- a) In other words, confess our sins, let go of sins, enjoy our time with Jesus and rest in Him.
  - b) There's the lesson in one sentence. There, now aren't you glad you read to the end? ☺
20. Let's pray: Father, We ask for your help in dealing with the sin issues of our lives. Help us to remember that You have forgiven us and help us to let go of the guilt and forgive ourselves. Further, help us to deal with the sin issues of our lives and even deal with how those issues have affected those around us. Finally, help us to have joy in our relationship with You, as You are our "bridegroom". Help us to rest in You and take regular time to be with You and just enjoy our time with You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.