

Fasting or feasting?

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[0 : 00] So we're looking at Mark's Gospel. This passage this morning, it'd be great if you could keep it. It should be on the screen, or it'd be great if you could keep a thumb in that passage.

It was on 949, or keep your phone open. It'd be a great encouragement to me. But this passage that we're looking at this morning, might come across as a little bit of a niche topic, talking about fasting. But the reality is, isn't it, that food is a part of everyday life. It's a big part of life. In Western society, it's normally three times a day minimum.

We think, maybe you're even doing that now, thinking about what you're going to eat at lunchtime. The issue that comes up today, in a sense, it's about fasting.

It's connected to eating habits. As I said, that might seem a bit of a niche topic. But the reality is, actually, that fasting in today's world has never been more of a cultural norm.

[1 : 05] There's a whole... Because outside of church life, there is a whole host of reasons why people choose to fast. One of the things you might have heard of, you maybe have even tried it.

There's this... It's been going... I've heard of it for... It's been going on for quite a while now. I think it's intermittent fasting. People limit themselves to consume all their food, all their daily intake to an eight-hour window.

And it's supposed to be a way of losing weight. And there's supposed health benefits as you do that. There's other reasons that people practice fasting. Sometimes people deliberately go a whole day without food to clear out their digestive system.

It's supposed to be good for them. There's been a whole host of research within the last 10 years that have detailed how beneficial it is. But health's not the only reason. People also fast politically. Remember Gandhi? I think it was 30 years of his life. Part of his political career was to use fasting as a political weapon. And we still hear on the news of people doing hunger strikes in protest.

[2 : 13] So there's fasting for health reasons, political fasting. But then maybe you've also experienced... When people fast not out of choice... But maybe this has happened to me following a traumatic event.

Some people who have severe grief or chronic mental health... Often one of the symptoms is that you can't eat. You lose your appetite. It's like an involuntary fast.

So actually, we might read this topic and think this is... What's this all about fasting? It's not actually a weird thing to talk about. Because people are doing it all the time. People are doing it all the time. I mean, I haven't even mentioned that we call... Our first meal a day is a great fast. So, you know, we're well aware of what it means. And we do it. The question that comes, I suppose...

Given that it's normal in our society... To go without food for certain reasons... Is there a difference? Is there a difference between that... How it's done in society...

[3 : 13] And fasting because you're a follower of Jesus? We know fasting can have a physical payoff. Does it have a spiritual benefit?

And if so, what and why? It stands to reason, doesn't it? It stands to reason that Jesus would want to talk about this. Because if food and fasting, as we've seen...

Is actually quite normal to daily life... Jesus would have something to say about it. We're going to be thinking about what that means... And that actually, hopefully, I want us to see that Jesus has something greater to teach us...

About his kingdom... Through the lens of thinking about that. Something much bigger than that. Just a quick refresh of where we're at in Mark's gospel. Always remind us...

I've been reminding us of this every single week. Mark 1, verse 1. This is what... If you want to know what Mark's all about... You look at the first verse. The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God. That is the tagline.

[4 : 12] That is the blurb on the book. This is what Mark's gospel is about. It is about Jesus Christ. The Son of God. The Messiah. Everything fits under that.

Everything that we're learning fits in that teaching. It's about what that means. Since we've got to... Just where we're at. Since we've got to chapter 2. There's a slightly different angle on things starts to take off.

As we look through chapter 2 and 3. There's five controversies that come up. Lewis, who he had last week. His lines he said is, What are you going to do with Jesus?

It's just right what he says. Because this is... What other people... Now that Jesus has arrived at the scene. What are they going to do with him? Because he keeps doing controversial stuff. The first with the paralyzed man.

He forgave sin. That's controversial. Because he used sin that he was God. Last week. With Lewis. He eats with sinners. It's controversial. There's no one worth doing that.

[5 : 14] And here we have the third controversy. Jesus' disciples. Jesus' disciples don't fast. We're talking about fasting. But we're talking... Here we're talking about not fasting.

Jesus' disciples don't fast. So the question... So the question... We're going to be... Should we fast? The first answer that I'm going to give you... The first answer... Is no.

You shouldn't fast. Because Jesus' bridegroom is here. No, we shouldn't fast. Because Jesus' bridegroom is here. We should feast. We shouldn't be fasting.

Feasting. We see how this discussion on fasting arises in verse 18. Verse 18. Now John's disciples and the Pharisees' disciples who were fasting. So people came and they asked Jesus, How is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting but yours are not?

Just a little bit of background. Actually, the only requirement for fasting in Judaism or for the Israelites, it was just one day a year on the Day of Atonement.

[6 : 19] That was all they had that was required. There's a few more suggested in the prophets, but in the actual law there's only one. However, over time it became sort of common practice for those who were more pious, more religious, to suggest, they suggested or started to get into a religious duty of fasting two days a week, Mondays and Thursdays.

Now, I'm in no way a doubt in the sincerity of these two days a week fasts, of their devotion to their God. Amongst them, as with us, no doubt there would have been a mix between those who were sincere in their devotion and those who did it because they just thought it was the right thing to do. The reason people are surprised at Jesus' disciples, they're really surprised at Jesus' disciples, because let's just remind ourselves what Jesus has been doing.

He's been teaching in the synagogue with authority. He's been healing people miraculously. And he's been stating in non-certain terms that he has the same authority as the God that they worship. He has divine authority. It is because of what Jesus has been doing and saying. No doubt the people, they think, well, this is what you've been doing and saying.

[7 : 39] At the very least, we would expect your disciples to fast the same, if not more. Because Jesus is claiming to, or he's showing them that he has more authority than John and of the Pharisees.

They would expect, at the very least, the same amount of fasting. More piety. More religiosity. And isn't it, it's such an interesting thing to ponder about assumptions.

Assumptions that the rest of the people make of those who are following Jesus. How they should be acting. They should be fasting, these guys. They're fasting over there.

They're fasting over here. Why aren't your guys fasting? I wonder, what people think Jesus, followers of Jesus today, Christians, should be doing?

What do they think we should be doing? What do you think, as a follower of Jesus, you should be doing? Is it stuff? Is it things, activities, that you think, that's what it means to be a Christian, is doing stuff?

[8 : 47] It's being, it's actually being a good person, it's helping the needy, giving to charity. Are those the things that followers of Jesus do? And if, if you're not a follower of Jesus, what do you think it means to be a Christian?

Is it about doing the right things? Or is there more to it? And for those of us who follow Jesus, we can get sometimes caught up in, thinking, it's about what we do.

But maybe God thinks better of us, or approves more of us, or accepts us a little bit more into his kingdom, if we just do the right things. The religious things.

Jesus puts the right. Jesus puts the right. Look with me in verse 19. Jesus answered, how can the guests of the bridegroom fast, whilst he's with them?

They cannot. So long as they have, so long as they have been with them. You see what he's saying? He said, my disciples don't fast.

[9 : 56] My disciples don't fast, because I'm here. Now, a wedding in those days, as it is today, a huge affair, but back then, I mean, normally the weddings I've gone to only last a day.

I've not been to one that was spread over a few days, but back then it was a day, maybe a whole week. Different people arriving, people traveling from, the reason they did that was because there was relatives, or people traveling from all over Israel to get to the wedding, or the party.

There'd be a huge feast, a huge party. And we have that tradition today, that we still have a big celebration, a big meal afterwards. It's a time to celebrate, normally a kelly.

Now, if you're invited to a wedding, if you're invited to a wedding, and you happen to be, I mentioned earlier, you happen to be on an intermittent path. You happen to be one of those who is putting all their, everything you consume, in between, into an intermittent fasting regime.

Going to a wedding would normally be the day when you have a day off. It would seem strange, wouldn't it? It would seem really strange, if the food was brought round to your table, and you said, I'm sorry, but I only eat between six and two.

[11 : 16] That would be strange. I'm guessing it would probably seem a little bit rude, because when you attend a wedding, the idea is that you're going to celebrate, with the bride and groom, and their special day, and part of that is, sitting on the table with, sometimes with people that you don't know, eating a fancy meal.

Jesus is telling, the reason my disciples don't fast is because the bridegroom of the wedding is here. He said, I'm not the bridegroom. My disciples will be my guests.

I'm the bridegroom. That might seem a little bit of a strange thing for Jesus to say about himself.

What does he mean? Did Jesus get married? In his earthly life, we know he didn't.

He's alluding to something so much deeper than that. In the book of Isaiah, God says, or Isaiah says, to the people about God, he says, for your maker is your husband.

The Lord Almighty is his name. The Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer. He's called the God of all the earth. And here, Jesus is calling himself the bridegroom. Yet again, Jesus is pointing out that he is God, the human bridegroom.

[12 : 30] He's God come down from heaven, and his bride, his bride, God's bride, will be his people. But everyone is invited to the banquet. It's the supper of the Lamb.

What I said to the kids, it's the supper of the Lamb who was slain. And just to remind you what I said to them, Luke 14, Jesus tells the story of the host of the wedding banquet. And he says, the master tells to the servant, go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in so that my house may be full.

Being a follower of Jesus, being a follower of Jesus, it's not about how much you do. It's not about how much you fast. It's not about what you do or whether you're a good person or not.

It's about realising that the King, the Lord Jesus himself, has invited you personally. You personally to these guests. These guests at the wedding feast.

Everyone is invited. You've been invited personally by the living God. It's not an impersonal invite to whoever fancies it, to whoever wants to come along. But Jesus wants you personally to be there.

[13 : 36] To be an invitation to feast with Jesus, to feast with the living God. And it doesn't go out to members only. It's not an exclusive guest list. But the invite goes out to everyone.

If we responded, if we RSVP, will we respond today? If you're a follower of Jesus, we should be the...

It's reason, the feast, is the happiest moment. We should be the happiest people alive. Because not only have we been invited, but we, the followers of Jesus, we've already said yes.

We feel them covered. Isn't it astounding that the one who made you, the one who made you, and the one who would hang on a cross for you, if you respond to his invitation, will already have a place for you.

You already have it reserved right now. With your name on it, saying, come and eat at the king.

Come and, come and eat with the king. Should we fast?

[14 : 45] No. This is where, this bridegroom is here. Okay, second point. Should we fast? Yes. Because Jesus has been taken away.

Should we fast? Yes. Because Jesus has been taken away. Look with me in verse 20. Jesus qualifies his initial statement. Verse 20, the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them.

Not on that day, they will fast. Now, there are a few things that Jesus could be referring to here. He could be referring to his death.

That in the days between his death and his resurrection, the disciples would have to fast. Which would mean that this was referring to them specifically.

And maybe they did fast when that happened. It was traumatic. And they would have been of deep sorrow. But I'm led to believe, because of the experiences that we have in our earthly lives, that this is not just for those disciples.

[15:51] This is for all Christians. It's not just for when Jesus was in the grave, but it's following his ascension. Jesus is taken back into heaven. He's taken away.

Yes, we have him by his spirit. Physically, he's not with us. And we know that following Jesus' ascension, even in the early church, and for us too, we have continued to face trials and testing and spiritual discipline.

And even now, we go through that. But we know what's in store when Jesus returns. We know that the wedding banquet, which we've mentioned earlier, we await that.

We know that we're not now enjoying that heavenly banquet every day. We know that sin is still at large and the effects of sin in our world, we prayed earlier about things that are happening in India, they're still plain to see.

And in one sense, we still, we do, we mourn the fact that that is the case. Whilst we wait in anticipation for the feast, we mourn that that is the case.

[17:00] Spiritual fasting, Christian fasting, fasting that followers of Jesus do, it's an act of devotion that says, we're hungry for more of God.

That is what it is saying, we're hungry for more of God in a world ravaged by sin. It's saying that we're hungry for a taste, a foretaste of what the new creation will be like.

We're spiritually hungry, starving in fact for more of Jesus. We're hungry to see foretastes of the kingdom of heaven for the sick to be made well. We're actually hungry for the kingdom of God to increasingly come in our own hearts.

We're hungry for that. We're hungry for holiness and we're spiritually hungry for people to turn to Jesus and follow him. That is what we're saying when Christians fast.

Fasting is denying yourself the feast. It's denying yourself the feast to say, I'm willing to go without the feast because my spiritual hunger for God and for what God is doing is great.

[18:11] And the reason we can fast, we do, is because we know that the feast is coming. That's the reason we can do it. We know the wedding banquet that's found in the corner.

We know that there's the place at the table. That's the reason we can fast because we long for it.

We long for the day when the mourning and the sorrow and the chaos and all the sin in our hearts is gone or the mess or the junk that we've experienced personally will be no more.

every tear and we'll be wiped from our eyes and we'll enjoy the feast in its fullness. We long for that. And so we fast. To plead for that.

To plead for that to happen. So do we fast? No. Because the bridegroom is here. Do we fast?

Yes. Because sin is still at large. Because the bridegroom has been taken away. We've been talking about fasting and feasting.

[19:17] But honestly, that is just the lens really that we're looking through to describe something much bigger that's going on here. But what we're really talking about is the arrival of the kingdom of heaven.

And how we are to live in light that the kingdom of heaven in one sense has already begun but in another way still awaiting for it in its fullness. Sometimes we call that the now.

The now. And the not yet. The kingdom of heaven is now. It is now. It has begun. It's been inaugurated. Jesus reigns as the king today as his kingdom is near. But it isn't.

We know it isn't here in its fullness. We await consummation. We await the new creation and all of sin to be destroyed. A helpful illustration that I've used before is to think of World War II.

World War II June the 6th 1944 D-Day landing. D-Day was the battle when the war was won. That's when the war was won.

[20 : 18] It was the decisive victory that brought about the beginning of the end. But the war didn't actually end until the 2nd of September 1945.

There's 15 months between D-Day and the end of the war. Now during those 15 months although the battle was won on D-Day there were still lots of skirmishes and smaller victories that needed to take place.

but it started but you had D-Day and then you had the end of the war but there's still lots of things that needed to happen. It is just like us for the life of the church.

The followers of Jesus are D-Day is not actually the cross. It's when Jesus' ministry began. We know that because he said in Mark 1 earlier when we looked at it he said the kingdom of heaven is near.

The king has arrived. The bridegroom's here. So just like D-Day was celebrated at the time we the people the disciples didn't have to fast then because the bridegroom was there.

[21 : 27] We celebrate we feast because the bridegroom is here with us by his spirit. There's still skirmishes there's still minor battles until the spiritual war is over.

But one day the battle will be finished. The war will have ended. We'll have our 2nd of September 1945 the equivalent of what it means in the spiritual.

Remember what Paul said. He said we're sorrowful yet always rejoicing. This is what he meant.

We're sorrowful yet have reasons to fast because we see the impact of sin in our world.

But we're always rejoicing. We have reasons to feast to be the most joyful people in the world because the real feast the wedding banquet the supper of the Lord is just around. So feasting and fasting.

Final thing I want to say is about these 2 illustrations. Final thing is Jesus' salvation is radically new. That's the final thing that Jesus wants to get at.

[22 : 37] The real issue is that the reason that they're quizzing Jesus about fasting is because they don't understand who he is or why he's come.

They don't understand what he's here to do. And you'll notice these 2 illustrations they sound a little bit confusing to begin with. And they're there to explain that the kingdom of heaven of which Jesus is the king is like nothing they could have imagined.

You see the illustrations they're essentially making the same point. Verse 21 No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment otherwise the new piece will pull away from the old making the tear worse.

The idea if you put a new piece of cloth an old piece of cloth in when you wash it the new cloth that you stuck on will shrink. But the old garment has already been washed so it's already shrunk.

So you've got one piece shrinking and one piece not. And so when it shrinks the tear that you put the new piece in just gets bigger. Same idea in verse 22 No one pours new wine into old wine skins otherwise the wine will burst the skins and both the wine and the wine skins will be ruined.

[23 : 54] No they pour new wine into new wine skins. New wine when you poured it in needed to ferment and when it did the fermentation process would stretch the wine skin.

So if you used an old wine skin it's already been stretched by the wine that was in it fermented before. So you had to put the new wine had to go into an unstretched wine skin so that it'd ferment and stretch together.

Put the new wine into old it'd stretch it'd already been stretched so it'd just burst. The point is with both of these illustrations is you can't use the new with the old.

Jesus is saying that he is like the new wine. He's saying he's not come to fit into the old order of things. He's not come to reform Judaism and make it better whilst carrying on the same state of play.

We're kind of used to having things updated and made better. I don't we've all experienced this updates on your phone every few months you get a I don't know on the iPhone you get a little red circle saying you need to update your operating system and it's I don't know it's something like 16.7.1 or something in your iPhone and you have to update and the idea is that every time it makes it slightly faster or quicker or does more stuff and makes it better you have a new operating system.

[25 : 24] but Jesus didn't come to me to make it Judaism like 2.0 now don't mishear me don't mishear me he's not rejecting the foundations of Judaism he's not rejecting the promises to Abraham but neither is he calling for a greater pious submission to the law where it's just about doing more stuff because of something new he's coming he's not coming to ask for greater

submission to the law but he's coming to fulfil it to bring it to consummation the old covenant with all the sacrificial system is going to give way to the new covenant the new era of salvation is dawning it's the new covenant that will be written in his blood where he will die once for all entering the most holy place where all sins are covered by his blood where redemption is certain that is the reason that is a reason to feast and we know that that's one of the things that is one of the things we're actually celebrating when we take the Lord's supper we're reminding ourselves that we're a feasting people when we take the Lord's supper it's his table that we come to he's the one you might think it's me inviting you to come up but it's not it's the Lord

Jesus inviting you to come up to the table to draw near with faith in him and receive the bread and the wine because he and he's when we take it of course we remind ourselves of the cross and the victory that he's he's done but we're reminding ourselves that one day we will drink from the vine with him physically physically present it points back to the cross but it points forward to the feast when we'll dine with the king and the bride who is here the king is here so we feast there's a place with your name on it he's reserved a place for you the king is coming he's not here in his fullness sin is still at large so we mourn so we fast because we want to see his kingdom come more in our hearts in our world we want people to turn to him so we fast what Jesus brings the bride is like nothing else for the same and that is the same for us it's the same for us actually when we come to Jesus because Jesus he doesn't come and make his home with you he doesn't come to promise a better version of you he doesn't come to make a better version of you he comes to make a new you just where there's death in us he brings life where there was lies in us he brings truth it's not a better version of you it's not the old life it's the old life taken away a new life almighty God we do thank you for all that you've done and we thank you that you've invited us and given us a place at your place and we look forward to the day when we will be pleased to you we look forward that we are a feasting people and we rejoice that we have so many reasons to do thanks to praise and to marvel at this amazing salvation we thank you that your work in us means that we are new people with a new life you make us new Lord

Jesus and we praise you for it but also we recognise that we are a pastor we see the sin in our world we see the sin in our hearts and we long to live lives that look more like the sun we long for it and we long for people to turn to you Lord Jesus we praise you and we give you great thanks for this that one day we will drink from the wine with you physically we thank you that this is possible because of what you do thank you for the good news of your son thank you that we can call you our friend thank you that we can call you our king thank you that you you invited us Lord we ask for your blessing upon us and we pray that you'd help us to meditate on these things it may help produce a great thrill in the way that we ask for this in the name of your song who you