



FROM CROSS TO CROWN

THE STORY OF JESUS IN THE GOSPEL OF MARK



LifeGroup
Bible Studies

FALL 2025 / SPRING 2026

Week 5: Jesus, Not Religion

Recap:

- Most scholars think Mark was written to Roman Christians (Mark was a co-worker of Peter and Paul).
- The gospel of Mark contains more historical narrative and less teaching than the other gospels.
- The things done and said in Mark's narratives expresses many Biblical truths.
- Up to now (Mark 1-2:12), Christ has authenticated his ministry as the God-man and Messiah performing miracles of healing, casting out demons, and forgiving sins (Mark 2:7 "who can forgive sins but God alone").

Mark 2:13–17

He went out again beside the sea, and all the crowd was coming to him, and he was teaching them. And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he rose and followed him.

And as he reclined at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?” And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”

Backdrop:

- Four disciples who were all fisherman were called by Jesus in Mark 1 (Simon (Peter), Andrew, James, and John).
- Rabbis typically only sought out top-notch highly educated students (not fisherman).
- Levi was a tax collector in Capernaum and Mark later calls him Matthew in Mark 3:18 - meaning “gift of God”.
- The name Levi refers to the priestly class that served the temple - he was quite the opposite.
- Tax collection in a thriving fishing village was very lucrative.
- Matthew was likely the tax collector oppressing the fisherman.

Why was Jesus calling of Levi a Jewish Tax Collector so Scandalous?


- They were regarded as traitors.
- Had to give up their Jewish identity.
- Lost their social status.
- Lost synagogue membership.
- Shunned by family.



- Christ was creating a diverse community where his disciples would even learn to love their former enemies.
- Even today Christ is calling people from diverse backgrounds to follow Him (“come follow me”).



- The calling of Levi then leads to a big dinner feast at his house where it says “many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him.”
- The Pharisees said, “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?”
- Christ replies “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”



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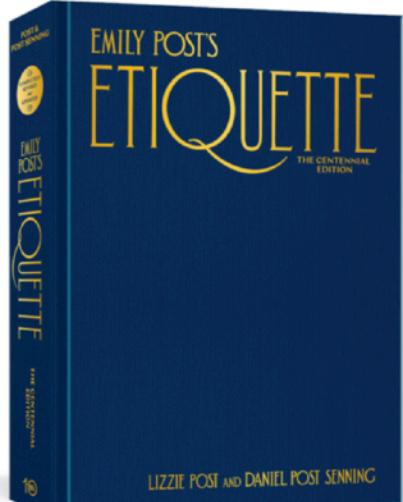
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- The Emily Post Institute carries on the tradition of its namesake, famed socialite Emily Post, providing etiquette tips.
- “When crafting a dinner party guest list, the Institute suggests carefully curating the collection of invitees – a *great* group of people will make for a wonderful party.”
- “Hosts must always keep in mind the significance of social dynamics when making invitations.”

“And as he **reclined** at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were **reclining** with Jesus and his disciples”



Reclining at the Table – Cultural Context

Roman and Greek Influence:

Reclining at meals was a prominent Greek custom adopted by the Romans and Jews, signifying relaxation and a state of well-being.

Symbol of Freedom:

The practice was also a declaration of freedom from bondage, a contrast to the standing meals of slaves, making it a fitting posture for the celebration of liberty.

Intimate Fellowship:

The close arrangement of guests around the table fostered a deeper, more personal communion among them.

“Scribes of the Pharisees”

- Not all scribes were Pharisees.
- The Pharisees were a religious sect of the Jews known for their strict devotion to the ceremonial aspect of the law and all their added Rabbinic traditions.
- The added traditions were thought to strengthen the Jews ability to abide by the law.

Historical notes concerning how Jewish legalism came about:

- About 450 BC to 30 BC, the Sopherim (scribes) added numerous laws to the original 613 commandments of the Mosaic law to allegedly build a fence around the law to keep Jews from breaking any of the commandments.
- A second school of rabbis called the Tannaim looked upon the work of the Sopherim and felt there were still too many holes in the fence and added more rules and laws (30 BC to 220 AD).
- Yet another school of rabbis called the Amoraim looked upon the work of the Tannaim and felt there were still too many holes in the fence and added even more rules and laws (220 AD to 500 AD).
- The work of the Sopherim and Tannaim are collectively called the Mishnah and became equal with scripture.
- The work of the Amoraim is called the Gemara. The Mishnah plus the Gemara comprise the Talmud.

Rabbinic Logic

God forbid the Israelites to boil a baby goat in the milk of its mother (Exodus 23:19 Exodus 34:26, and Deuteronomy 14:21) – to avoid a Canaanite practice of an offering to Baal.



Suppose you eat a piece of young goat meat and drink a glass of milk. If the milk by some chance came from its mother you would seethe the goat in its mothers milk in your stomach.



New Law: A Jew cannot eat meat and dairy in the same meal – these must be separated by at least 4 hours.

Christ, the Mishnah, and the Pharisees

- The Mishnah was the source of contention between Jesus and the Pharisees.
- The Mishnah was about 1,500 pages (folios) of small print.
- The Pharisees believed that the Messiah himself would be a Pharisee and adhere to the Mishna.
- And they believed the Messiah would help them add even more laws to plug holes in the fence.
- Anyone who was not a Pharisee under Mishnaic authority could not be the Messiah.
- After the time of Christ, the Gemara became the size of a set of Britannica Encyclopedias.



ARIEL'S BIBLE COMMENTARY



THE BOOK OF ROMANS



*Exposition from a
Messianic Jewish Perspective*

ARNOLD G. FRUCHTENBAUM
Th.M., Ph.D.

“Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?”

- The term “sinners” was derogatory lingo from the Jewish honor/shame culture of the day.
- Dinner parties weren’t just parties; they were a significant part of the honor/shame culture.
- If a morally upright person was eating with a sinner it was considered shameful because it implied acceptance of their sin.
- In their Jewish culture, there was no concept of reaching out to sinners to try to bring them to the Lord.
- Religious people just stayed as far away from sinners as possible so they didn’t taint their image.

“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”

- The self-righteous Pharisees did not consider themselves sinners (sick) in need of a physician.
- Jesus’ eating with sinners showed He didn’t care about their honor-system culture.
- Christ values all people equally, and He knows that no human earns his own righteousness.
- Romans 3:23 “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”
- Romans 3:24 We “are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”
- Ephesians 2:8-9 : “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

Mark 2:18–22

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?” 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. The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day. 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. 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.”

“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?”

- John's disciples and the Pharisees fasted because it was a spiritual discipline in Jewish culture.
- In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus talked about doing religious things with a pure devotion to God, not to be seen as publicly righteous - addressing the three primary disciplines of the Jewish faith – fasting, almsgiving, and prayer (Matthew 6:1–18).
- The purpose of fasting in the OT was to humble yourself before God (Isaiah 58:3).
- The law commanded fasting once a year on *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement to be humble before God and mourn your sin (Leviticus 16:29–30).
- All other Jewish holidays were times of feasting and celebration – not fasting.
- The Pharisees fasted twice a week (Mondays and Thursdays) accompanied by outward signs of mourning and penitence such as wearing sackcloth & ashes.





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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.”

- The disciples weren't in a time of mourning they were in the presence of Jesus - a time of celebration.
- The “bridegroom” imagery is connected to the metaphor God used throughout OT Scripture of God Himself as the faithful husband to Israel - Jesus was equating Himself with God as the groom of His people.
- While Jesus was with them, they would celebrate. They would mourn when He was taken away from them (alluding to His death).

“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. 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.”

- Fasting twice a week (like the Pharisees) wasn't commanded in the Law - it was one of the many rules the Pharisees added to the law.
- Jesus' comments about the new garment and the new wineskins addressed this very issue of adding things to God's law.
- The Pharisees adding to God's law with extra rules was like adding a new patch to an old garment - it didn't work.
- Jesus was doing a new thing that wasn't about adding more rules - it was about living in relationship with the groom Himself.
- Jesus didn't come to patch the Law with new pieces - He came to fulfill the Law and initiate the new covenant.

Mark 2:23–28

One Sabbath he was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. And the Pharisees were saying to him, “Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?” 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: 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?” And he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.”

Did the Disciples break the Sabbath?

- The disciples picking grain to eat as they were going through the fields on the Sabbath wasn't against the actual OT but against the extra rules the Pharisees had added to the law.
- God's law about the Sabbath is pretty general – keep it holy (set apart) as sacred or different (Exodus 20:8) and don't do any work but rest.
- For example, the Pharisees added extra rules like how far you were allowed to walk, the types of knots that couldn't be tied (or untied), what could be carried or moved, etc. – 24 chapters in the *Mishnah* with more than 600 regulations.
- Christ could have pointed out the extra rules, but instead endorses the priest Ahimelech giving the show bread to David's men since the priest had the authority to interpret and apply *Torah* guidelines to individual situations.
- Some *Torah* ceremonial laws could be set aside if a higher consideration warranted it, especially the preservation of life.

“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.

So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.”

- God instituted the Sabbath as a day of rest (7th day of creation) from man’s labors, but the Pharisees turned it into a burden.
- Exodus 20:11 - “For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”
- By claiming to be Lord of the Sabbath, Jesus was once again declaring His divinity.
- And by linking this to the 7th day of creation (Sabbath) – He claimed His role as Creator.
- Colossians 1:16 – “For by Him (Christ) all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities - all things were created through him and for him.”

Mark 3:1–6

Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there with a withered hand. And they watched Jesus, to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. And he said to the man with the withered hand, “Come here.” 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. 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. The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

“Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there with a withered hand. And they watched Jesus, to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him.”

- Many Bible commentators believe that the Pharisees hand-picked this man who had an obvious infirmity to see what Jesus would do on the Sabbath.
- The man’s withered hand was not a life-threatening condition and could have been healed on any other day of the week.
- Not only was it the Sabbath but the setting was in a sacred place – a Jewish synagogue.
- The Pharisees had no doubt that Jesus could heal anything at this point since he had already done many healing miracles – but would he do it on the Sabbath in a Synagogue?

“Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?”

- Christ makes a Sabbath healing in a Synagogue an intentional public incident.
- Rabbinic law forbid the practice of medicine on the Sabbath - not OT law.
- Christ framed this question to change the issue from a legal to a moral problem – to not heal would have been evil.
- Jesus was forcing the Pharisees to examine their tradition regarding the Sabbath to see if it was Consistent with God’s OT law and merciful Character.

“The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.”

- This verse climaxes this section on Christ's conflicts in Galilee with the Jewish religious leaders.
- It is Mark's first reference to Christ's death being planned by the religious leaders.
- The Pharisees conspired with the political supporters of Herod Antipas (Herodians) – two groups that traditionally hated each other.
- Christ's ministry threatened the authority of all sorts of Jewish leaders.