

**Mark 2:13-17, 18-22, Eating and Fasting**  
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**Overview**

Follow Mourlon Beernaert's analysis

1. Five sections with two matching transitions

	Sin	Sabbath
a) Healing	2:1-12	3:1-6
b) (Son of Man's Authority)	(2:10-12)	(2:27-28)
c) Eating, Disciples	2:13-17	2:23-28
d) Bridegroom's Authority	2:18-22	

2. Lessons:

- a) Shows the complete blossoming of opposition, and sets the stage for the crucifixion, already at the beginning of ch. 3!
- b) Caps the *demonstration* of the Lord's authority in ch. 1 with three *assertions* of it.

3. This study:

- a) 13-17, The Call of Levi--another opposition episode
- b) 18-22, The Messianic Wedding--claim to authority

**A. 13-17, Call of Levi**

Increasing controversy, still over the Lord's authority re. sin.

1. 13, Context of the Call

- a) *Where* did the Lord go? "By the sea." Why?
  - 1) To make room for the multitudes, cf. 1:45. There were too many to accommodate in the town. But why the specific mention of the sea?
  - 2) Note "again." Only previous reference to going by the sea is 1:16, when he called the first four disciples. Now he goes there again to get another one.
- b) *Who* was there? The multitude, enthusiastic over his miracles and his teaching.
- c) *What* did he do? Taught them. The miracles were only to attract people to the teaching. The Word of God takes priority over signs and wonders.

2. 14, The Call itself

- a) "He saw Levi ... sitting." The one the Lord singles out for a special call is not part of the multitude.
  - 1) He was a publican, a collector of Roman tolls. The main road from Damascus to the Mediterranean ran through Capernaum, so it was an important place for a custom house.
  - 2) Though Jewish, he worked for the Romans and in support of

them, thus was despised by the Jews. Not only were the Romans unclean Gentiles, but they were also the oppressors.

- 3) So he would not be popular in town, or welcome in the enthusiastic crowd that follows the Lord to the seaside.
  - 4) Sets up the question asked by the scribes and pharisees. Why associate with sinners? With all these good solid Jewish citizens of Capernaum at your heels, why go seek out a publican?
- b) The command: "Follow me." Three such specific invitations in Mark: 1:17 (the fishermen), 10:21 (the ruler), and 2:14 (Levi). All are informed by a general invitation in 8:34, which lays down two preparatory steps.
- 1) Deny self. The Lord will not have us if he does not have all of us. The multitudes following him wanted Jesus in addition to their own comfort, security, and self-respect. But the Lord calls us to forsake the things that are precious to us, so that he is sovereign in our will and our daily life. The fishermen did this when they left their nets, their boats, their families. The rich young ruler failed on this point when he refused to leave his riches.
  - 2) Take up cross. Not yet explicit at this point in the history. Only in 8:31 does Jesus "begin" to explain his coming death to the disciples, and immediately after this he requires them to take their place with him. "Deny self" means that we must choose between ourselves and the Lord; "take up cross" means that we must choose between the Lord and the world, which will hate us for our love for him.
- c) The response:
- 1) "He arose," thus "denying himself." Walked away from the custom house, with its chests of money and his colleagues in the trade.
  - 2) "He ... followed him," which he can now do wholeheartedly, having fulfilled the first condition.

### 3. 15-17, Consequences of the Call

- a) 15a, The Dinner  
The first thing Levi does after "following" Jesus is to bring Jesus into his home, and introduce him to all his friends! Following the Lord does not mean going into a monastery or becoming a hermit; it means bringing the Lord into our lives so others can know him too.
- b) 15b, The Diners  
Note the syntax:
  - 1) Main sentence describes three characteristics of the diners:

- a> Their number ("many")
- b> Their morality ("publicans and sinners")
- c> Their association with the Lord ("sat together with Jesus")

2) The next two clauses amplify only two of these three:

- a> They were many
- b> They followed him.

This seemingly otiose repetition has the purpose of forcing us to ask, "What about the third characteristic, their moral character?" This in turn sets us up for the Jews' question.

c) 16, The Disapproval

- 1) Note increase over the previous episode. There, the scribes reasoned in their hearts silently. Here, they voice their criticism, but only to the disciples.
- 2) Reflects the Jewish tradition of the day, not to associate with Gentiles or sinners. Motivated by fear of defilement (OT laws of purity).
- 3) Don't confuse with NT command not to eat with sinners (1 Cor. 5:9-13), where the motive is not our own purity but the reform of the sinner (v.5).

d) 17, The Difference

The Jews sought to avoid defilement; a negative religion that could not benefit anyone. The Lord's motive is restoration and healing, which requires him to be with sinners, not to share in their sin, but to draw them from it. His response reflects upon the Pharisees in three points:

- 1) By refusing to associate with him themselves, they are claiming not to be sick. "You don't think you need me, or you'd be here with them, rather than outside complaining."
- 2) Even as those who consider themselves well, if they are unwilling to associate with the "sick," they must not be physicians, so they'd better not complain about his contributions.
- 3) By claiming health, they are *not* being called "to repentance," a phrase that up to this point is associated with entrance into the kingdom (1:4, 15). Thus they are rejecting what ought to be their greatest desire and delight.

## B. 18-22, Question of the Fast

- 1. The chiastic center of the opposition section, and distinct from what is around it.

- a) Only a question; not associated with a specific action, as the surrounding paragraphs are.
- b) Question posed by the *disciples* of John and of the Pharisees, not by the Jewish leaders themselves. A completely different level of question; more for genuine information than as a challenge.
  - 1) Fast Monday and Thursdays ("twice in the week," Luke 18:12).
  - 2) John's disciples may have been mourning his imprisonment or death.
- c) Associated with neither sin (the theme of 2:1-17) nor the Sabbath (2:23-3:6); focus on the Lord as the heavenly Bridegroom, which with 10-12 and 27-28 is a strong claim to deity. The Lord develops this theme in three steps. Rather than seeing three unrelated metaphors (bridegroom, garments, wine), it is possible and preferable to see in the garments and wine the accoutrements of the Messianic bridal feast.

## 2. 19-20, The Bridegroom

The prophets pictured the Messianic age as a wedding, in which repentant Israel is rejoined to her husband Jehovah, Isa. 62:1-4; Hos 2:14-23; cf. Isa 49:18; 54. Compare John's introduction of Jesus in John 3:29 as the bridegroom.

The Lord makes two startling claims:

- a) 19, The Messianic age has arrived:
  - 1) The "Children of the bridechamber" are the wedding guests, here the disciples.
  - 2) He is the bridegroom (a claim to deity, for Jehovah was Israel's bridegroom).
  - 3) The reason they do not fast is that the bridegroom is presently with them.
- b) 20, The Messianic age will be interrupted in a way that will bring sorrow to his followers. They could have known this from Isa 53 and Ps 22, but most did not. John 16:20-22 shows that the reference is to the Lord's crucifixion, and that this period of mourning ends with his resurrection. The Lord's announcement of this period of mourning in the very center of the opposition chiasm shows his knowledge of, and sovereign control over, the entire program.

## 3. 21, Patched Garments

- a) Relation to the Bridegroom:
  - 1) One of the Lord's parables (Matt. 22:11) reflects the importance of the wedding garment, and the danger of being without one.
  - 2) In the OT, Isa 61:10 (cf. 61:3) links new garments with the wedding as illustrative of the messianic age.

- b) The natural phenomenon: the old garment has shrunk, but the new has not, and when the patched combination is washed, the new shrinks away from the old and rips it even worse.
- c) Of the two groups that are asking about fasting, the Lord's saying appears to be directed primarily against the self-righteousness of the Pharisees.
  - 1) The Lord provides the required wedding garment (Isa 61:10 "he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness").
  - 2) The Pharisees come to the wedding in their old clothes, the "filthy rags" of self-righteousness (Isa 64:6).
  - 3) The patches of "new cloth": outward attempts to patch their own failings with superficial adherence to Godly conduct.
  - 4) The ripping indicates that their deception cannot succeed, and they will be seen as imposters.

#### 4. 22, Wineskins

- a) Again, related to the theme of the Messianic age.
  - 1) On the importance of wine at weddings, John 2.
  - 2) Isa 25:6, Jer 31:12 (cf. whole chapter), Zech 9:16,17 associate wine with the Messianic age.
- b) Natural phenomenon: the gas given off during fermentation will burst an older skin that has lost its resilience.
- c) This figure may be more directed at the disciples of John. Unlike the Pharisees, they understood the need for "the lamb of God, who carries the sin of the world" (John 1:29). But they mistakenly thought that his teaching could be contained within the constraints of Jewish tradition. Compare John's disciples in Ephesus, Acts 19, who did not even know that there was a Holy Spirit. Can't bottle up the new life in Christ in the old Jewish ceremonial system.

5. Summary: Christ is the heavenly bridegroom, come to inaugurate the promised messianic age, and his wedding guests must be prepared for the changes that this age will bring, rather than fighting against it.