

With Christ, the Presence of God Is Here

Mark 2:18-22

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Introduction:

What wonderful things we have been learning from the Gospel of Mark about our Lord Jesus Christ.

- In Him, we have a Saviour who brings blessings to us from heaven. He came down from heaven for that purpose... to establish His kingdom in the world.
- As sinners, we were cut off from God—condemned and alienated from Him, but Jesus is the Son of God, and the Father sent Him to reconcile us.
 - We have seen in Mark that:
 - Jesus brings God’s Word to us so that we hear the voice of God.
 - He brings the authority of God to us to cast out demons.
 - He brings the compassion of God to us to heal our infirmities.
 - He brings the agenda of God to us to spread the gospel to the nations.
 - He brings the willingness of God to cleanse us from our defilement.
 - He brings the forgiveness of God to us.
 - He brings the restoring grace of God to us as those who were lost in sin.
 - And today we are going to see that Jesus, by coming, brings the presence of God to us.
 - He has come to betroth us to Himself so that we can live in His house forever.
 - This brought about a huge change in history by which we date our calendar—this is Anno Domini (the year of our Lord) 2019.
 - By coming among us, He ushered in a new age of fulfilment that replaced the Old Testament dispensation of promise.

Today, by preaching to you, I desire to connect you to Him as the One who has come.

- We are connected by faith, and faith comes by hearing the word of God preached.
- That is really what Biblical preachers are always seeking to do—to connect you to Christ.
 - But that is especially my aim today because that is what our text talks about... the very fact that Jesus came to us and that a lot of people miss that.
 - You only connect with Him through preaching when God’s Spirit opens your heart to receive the word with faith.
 - And let me say that once you believe, it is an ongoing experience—our connection with Christ is deepened as we receive the word.

Listen as I read today’s text to you.

- It is from Mark 2:18-22—and again, this is the Word of God.
 - May it work powerfully in you, even as you hear it read and preached to you, that you may connect with Jesus and connect more fully with Him.

Mark 2:18-22: The disciples of John and of the Pharisees were fasting. Then they came and said to Him, “Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?” ¹⁹ **And Jesus said to them, “Can the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them**

they cannot fast. ²⁰ But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days. ²¹ No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; or else the new piece pulls away from the old, and the tear

is made worse. ²² And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine bursts the wineskins, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins.”

And there we end the reading of God’s holy and infallible word that connects you to Jesus.

You can see from this text that:

I. Many people in the church were out of touch with God when Jesus came.

A. The disciples of the Pharisees and the disciples of John certainly were.

1. These two groups were both praying and fasting that the Messiah would come.
 - a. The Pharisees were a movement within Judaism that had sprung up when the Greeks had tried to force the Jews to embrace Greek culture.
 - The Greeks were the dominant world power and concluded that they were therefore the best—and they wanted everyone else to be like them and to acknowledge how wonderful they were.
 - But the Jewish religion was in the way—with its food laws and its confession that there was only one God—and its view that salvation was of the Jews, through their coming Messiah who was promised.
 - The Pharisees arose out of those pious Jews—many of them possessing true saving faith—who were living in hope of God’s promises.
 - They were not so impressed with the Greek culture because they were looking in faith for the city whose builder and maker is God.
 - They were looking for the promise of redemption and of deliverance from Satan and the curse.
 - And so the Pharisees were among those who stood up against the Greeks as they tried to force Jews to dispense with their religion.
 - They were very zealous, and they, along with a lot of other Jews, prayed earnestly for God’s promises to be fulfilled—
 - that He would visit them, that He would pour out His Spirit on them, that He would reveal His glory, renew them in righteousness, speak His truth to them, reform them and their worship, deliver them...
 - Above all, they prayed that the Messiah would come.
 - They joined fasting with their prayers, even setting aside every Monday and Thursday for fasting.
 - The Pharisees, along with other earnest Jews, had been doing this for almost 200 years.
 - b. And then there were John’s disciples.
 - John was the voice crying the wilderness, “Prepare the way of the LORD.”
 - He had promised that the one who was coming would not only baptise with water as John did, but with the Holy Spirit.

- His whole purpose was to prepare the way of the coming one.
 - That means that his disciples, even more than the Pharisees' disciples, were focused on the coming of the Messiah!
 - Like many other Jews, they were fasting and praying that He would come,
 - and John was saying that the time had come and had even pointed to Jesus as the coming one and said that Jesus must increase and he must decrease.
 - He had called Him the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.
 - Of all people, the disciples of John should have seen that He did come, and if they had obeyed John, they would have ceased to be the disciples of John and become the disciples of Christ like Peter, Andrew, James, and John had done.
2. Both the Pharisees and the disciples of John should have recognised that their fasting and prayers had been answered...the Messiah was here.
- a. Here was this man that John had pointed to, and at whose baptism a voice from heaven had declared that He was His Son...
 - The Holy Spirit had come down upon Him in a way that had been made visible, showing that He was truly the anointed one.
 - b. And not only that, but this man was going around preaching like no man had ever preached, and with authority that no man ought to claim unless He is much more than a mere man.
 - And He had been casting out demons in His own name, forgiving sins in His own name, healing the sick, cleansing lepers...
 - And above all that He had been preaching that with Him the Kingdom of God had come and that everyone should repent and believe the gospel.
- Both the Pharisees and the disciples of John should have been celebrating that their prayers had been answered...
3. But instead they come and question Jesus as to why His disciples are not fasting!
- **v. 18 "Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?"**
 - a. It seems clear that this is one of those questions that has a barb in it...
 - In other words, the implication is, "Jesus, your disciples are not on par with us—we fast and your disciples don't."
 - It is rather likely that the feast at Levi's house was an added cause of offense in that Jesus was not only eating with tax collectors and sinners, but feasting on one of the days of fasting.
 - That is not certain, but both Matthew and Luke mention this challenge about fasting immediately after the account of the feast at Levi's house.
 - And of course the Pharisees, at least, were quite out of touch with the marvellous reality that these tax collectors and sinners were no longer tax collectors and sinners.
 - Feasting was definitely called for.

- But their point is that Jesus' disciples were inferior to the disciples of John and of the Pharisees and needed to pick up their slack and get with the programme!
 - b. They entirely miss the point: Jesus had not led His disciples to fast because He, their Messiah, had come!
 - The hope of Israel was here, so why pray that He will come?
 - The desire of all nations had come, so why fast?
 - It was a day for feasting and praise, not for fasting and prayer.
- B. Jesus makes it clear that the reason His disciples are not fasting is because He is here!
- Look at verse 19:
 - **Mark 2:19: And Jesus said to them, "Can the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast."**
1. Jesus presents Himself here as the bridegroom.
 - a. The designation *bridegroom* was never used to refer to the Messiah in the Old Testament, and only rarely in other Jewish writings.
 - God was sometimes spoken of as the husband of Israel... so if anything, it is an even stronger claim than Messiahship...
 - It shows that Jesus is the Son of God.
 - As we have seen, at this time, Jesus avoided making it known that He was the Christ or the Messiah because there was so much misunderstanding about the Messiah—even that He would not die which is the very thing that He came to do.
 - b. But bridegroom becomes a very wonderful description of Him in the New Covenant.
 - As bridegroom, He came to make arrangements to take His bride as His wife and to bring her into His Father's house.
 - He had to pay all of her debts, which He did by going to the cross.
 - Do you understand?
 - She had a debt of sin that would have excluded her from His Father's house... I'm talking about God the Father of course.
 - God would not have guilty sinners in His house, and the only way to rectify their wrongs was for Jesus to suffer the pains of hell on the cross for them.
 - That's right, He suffered the full penalty of their sin so that He could take them as His bride.
 - And when the Father accepted His sacrifice for us, He raised Him from the dead, showing that we were all accepted in Christ.
 - If you trust in Him for the forgiveness of your sins so that you can come to live in God's house, He will accept you too.

2. So Jesus told the disciples of John and of the Pharisees that it would be entirely inappropriate for His disciples to fast while He was with them!
 - This was a time for rejoicing, not fasting!
 - By fasting when the Messiah was among them the disciples of John and of the Pharisees were acting as if He had still not come!
 - Can you imagine it?
 - Suppose there was a young woman whose fiancée had been lost sea, and who made it a habit to go out on the shore and pray for his return each evening with her siblings and parents and her fiancée’s family...
 - And suppose he should return and that when evening came and the families began to feast, the young woman’s sister and brother should come to the bridegroom and say,
 - “What is with this feasting? Is it not time for us to go out now for prayer and fasting as we do each evening? How is it that since you have come, they no longer join us for the fast?”
 - The bridegroom would say, “How can they fast and pray for my return when I am here? They cannot fast while I am with them.”
 - It would be absurd to do so because their prayer was answered.
 - It was not time for fasting but for feasting.
 - Jesus goes on to say in verse 20 that in time, He will be taken away again—the word suggests forcibly—and that then His disciples will fast.
 - But as long as He is with them, it would be entirely inappropriate.

➤ Does this not expose a huge problem that is common in the church today?

II. Beware that you are not out of touch with God like this.

- A. This is Satan’s goal—to make you religious, but dead.
 1. He has had great success with this over the years.
 - His success is seen right here in our text with the disciples of John and of the Pharisees.
 - Here were religious people, fasting and praying—the more devout among their people—and they don’t even recognise it when God answers their prayers!
 - They just keep right on praying and fasting as if nothing has happened.
 2. Donald Grey Barnhouse, the minister at Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia from 1927-1960 once made this point about Satan’s work.
 - He said, “What would Philadelphia look like if Satan entirely took over?”
 - The bars would all be closed, the people would all be together in nice friendly neighbourhoods... and they would all go to church on Sunday...
 - But the gospel would not be preached.
 3. Satan loves to have traditionalists who go to church every Sunday and who say their prayers and read their Bibles—but don’t know the LORD.
 - Or maybe they are enthusiasts who are always talking about how the Lord did this and did that in their lives, how He helps them make it through the day, and how close they felt to Him in worship, but who do not see that they are sinners who need a Saviour to atone for their sins.

➤ In both cases, Satan is very pleased—he has kept them from Christ and they feel very good about themselves.

B. You need two things to stay in touch with the LORD.

1. First, you need sound doctrine.

- You need to know who God is...
 - An understanding of what He has done as your creator and redeemer.
 - An understanding that Jesus is the Son of God who is equal with the Father and who came from glory to save us from our sins.
 - And that to save us, He went to the cross and shed His blood for our pardon and that He is coming again to judge every person.
 - And you need to know that whoever believes in Him will be saved.
- You need to be clear about God's person and work.
 - You need to be sound in the faith that was once delivered to the saints.

➤ But that is not all...

2. Secondly, in order to stay in touch with the LORD, you need living faith.

- a. You need an ongoing awareness of your spiritual health and that of the church—so that your prayers will be genuine and not just rote.
 - It is very different to say the words and to truly pray with meaning!
 - So that you repent and cry out to Him for growth and deliverance.
 - You can fast and all that, but still pray without your heart involved.
- b. You need to be engaged in the spiritual battle that is going on daily with your flesh, the world, and the devil—
 - so that you are engaged in overcoming for Christ's sake and so that you are depending on Him to keep you. Satan wants to have you.
- c. And you need a consciousness of God's work all around us each day...
 - so that you thank Him for your daily bread—not just say it, but truly recognise that He provided it;
 - and so that you respond to His promises in life;
 - and so that you have special seasons of prayer;
 - and so that His word addresses you specifically and personally... bringing you encouragement and rebuke when needed.

TRANS> Jesus puts us back in touch with God by His living presence.

- So He answered the initial question as to why His disciples were not fasting.
 - But He does not stop with that.
 - He goes deeper.
 - He anticipates the great collision that will come with the Jews when the worship of the Old Covenant is replaced by the worship of the New Covenant.
 - This very question that was raised by the disciples of John and of the Pharisees anticipates the problem that will come when the fact of the bridegroom's coming changes more than just fasting days.

III. Jesus explains that with His coming, a whole new order is called for.

A. So much changed with His coming to earth.

- 1. As I showed you, our Bridegroom came to make all the arrangements for us to marry Him and to live in His Father's house. He has finished that work.

- a. He paid all of our debts at the cross.
 - We had a whole pile of them and He knew it when He came to betroth us to Himself and that is in fact why He came—to save us by giving His life a ransom for us.
 - He has paid in full and He has fulfilled in our behalf, as our groom, all that is required for us and Him to be accepted in the Father's house.
 - This is a huge change—no longer are we waiting for our redemption as under the Old Covenant.
 - Jesus has made all the arrangements—the way is open for full acceptance.
 - b. And He has also poured out His Spirit to prepare us to live with Him.
 - 1) He does that for each individual that comes to make up His bride.
 - The Holy Spirit comes to us to call us into union with Him.
 - It is Jesus' way of gathering each one of us in.
 - It is the Spirit who shows us our need and who shows us what our bridegroom has done to prepare a place for us.
 - And it is the Spirit who changes us so that we come to Him, trusting in our Bridegroom and devoting ourselves to Him—as those yearning to live with Him in His Father's house forever in holiness and righteousness.
 - 2) And He gathers not only Jews, but also people from all the nations of the world.
 - He is still doing that today until His Father's house is full.
 - 3) If you wish to come, the invitation is there... the way is wide open.
 - All who come are welcome.
 - The only reason anyone is excluded is because he will not come.
 - And the only ones who come are those He transforms by grace.
 - The fact is, you are too stubborn and will never come unless He graciously draws you.
- But you see what a huge change this is.
- Jesus has made all the arrangements to fill His Father's house with His bride—to bring her in.
2. This huge change calls for an entirely new system of worship.
 - a. The old system of worship (Old Testament worship) could not continue.
 - It was anticipatory of His coming—it looked forward to His coming and yearned for Him to come. It was suited to that time.
 - It was the worship at the temple with priests and laws of clean and unclean and sacrifices, all to show us that we must be purified to live in God's house.
 - b. Now that He has come...we have been purified!
 - 1) Now there is a new and better priesthood than that of Aaron.
 - Now our bridegroom is our priest—the only priest.
 - He Himself is the sacrifice—no other should be offered.
 - He has offered it and it has been accepted and we have full forgiveness through it and He ever lives to make intercession for us.

- 2) There are new sacraments...
 - *Circumcision* is replaced by *baptism in His name* showing that both our guilty record and our wicked heart are cleansed by Him.
 - And the *Passover* is replaced by the *Lord's Supper*, showing that He Himself is the Passover sacrifice that takes away our sins.
 - 3) Above all, our worship is changed from type and shadow to spirit and truth... from promise to fulfillment.
 - The focus is not on ceremonies anymore, but on preaching that declares what He has done—preaching the gospel replaces ceremonial worship.
 - We respond to the good news by praise, the fruits of our lips giving thanks to His name.
 - 4) And there is a fresh call to love—to love one another as He has loved us and has given Himself for us.
 - We all make up His bride and we are to love one another with pure heart fervently as He has loved us... all before His face who ever lives.
3. This is a wonderful change.
- Now that our bridegroom has come, there is more joy, more power for living, more assurance (for we see who had paid our debt and we see what He has done to pay our debt), more revelation of God's glory—of His love, justice, wisdom, holiness, power, mercy, and grace now revealed in our bridegroom.
 - This new worship is also easier to spread through the nations—there is no central sanctuary but rather a glorious message of finished work by our bridegroom.

TRANS> Yet, Jesus knew that it would be hard to accept this New Covenant worship.

- He knew that people would find it hard, as the disciples of the Pharisees and John did, to fully come to grips with the fact that He had come and done all.

B. Jesus warned the Jews that they must embrace these changes of worship under the New Covenant or come to ruin.

- He tells them this through two parables.
1. First, by the parable of the old cloth, He shows that He did not come merely to patch up the old.
 - Verse 21 says: **“No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; or else the new piece pulls away from the old, and the tear is made worse.”**
 - a. The cloth they used would shrink, so everyone knew that if you took an old garment and tried to patch it up with a patch made of new cloth,
 - the new cloth would shrink and make an even larger hole in the tired old fabric.
 - b. By this, Jesus is showing that you can't take Him and use Him to patch up Judaism.
 - Those who try to do that will end up with a ruined garment.
 - The Old Covenant was not suitable for the time of Christ.
- The second parable is very similar...

2. It is the parable of the wineskins. It shows that Jesus cannot be contained in the old order.
 - Verse 22 says **“And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine bursts the wineskins, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins.”**
 - Jesus our bridegroom must have His own worship—the worship of the New Testament—not that of the old or any other that man might devise.
- C. Accepting the New Covenant has been a constant struggle for the church.
- We always seem to think that the New Covenant worship needs to be blended with our own philosophy and way of worship.
1. It was a problem for the Jews, even before Jesus went to the cross as our text shows...
 - We have these Pharisees and these disciples of John who are mindlessly clinging to the old way... even to the tradition of fasting because they have not reckoned with the fact that Jesus has actually come.
 - This clinging to the old keeps them from seeing what God has done!
 - But this is just a small foretaste of the immense proportions to which this problem grows.
 2. It was the great controversy of the early church during the time of the apostles.
 - Those who could not fully accept that our bridegroom had done all, wanted to hang on to the old system of sacrifices and circumcision and food laws.
 - It was not appropriate because Jesus had come!
 - A system that anticipated Him was no longer appropriate.
 - Those who tried to use Jesus to patch up things under the Old Covenant system found that the new cloth tore loose...
 - The new wine could not be contained without bursting the old wineskins.
 - So it is to this day with the Messianic Jewish movement.
 - They are trying to fit Christ into a place He does not belong.
 - He deserves the honour of a new way of worship—the way of fulfillment.
 3. All through the ages of church history that problem continues as efforts have been and still are made to synthesise New Covenant worship with prevailing ideas.
 - a. When the gospel reached the Greeks, there was this tendency to try to patch up Greek religion and philosophy.
 - The result was heresies that denied the unique nature of Christ as fully God and fully man—reducing Him to be no real saviour at all and leaving the worshippers to make their own way of salvation.
 - b. And then there were those came along who tried to fit Him in to the pagan modes of worship...where He does not belong...
 - The pagans found it hard to give up their prayers to ancestors and to a plurality of gods, so the idea of praying to Mary and the saints was introduced.
 - And soon preachers (that belong to the New Covenant order of Christ) were replaced with priests with big robes and hats burning incense and offering sacrifices because that is what the pagans were used to.

- But the result is that now, instead of finding salvation in the finished work of Christ, salvation is found in man—saints and priests and ceremonies.
- c. And in more recent times,
 - You have those who try to fit Christ into modern philosophy—such as rationalism that denies the supernatural...
 - And moralism that denies the inherent sin of all people...
 - Or to the psychological view that man needs most of all to have his self-esteem boosted and Jesus is made the minister of that.
 - You need self-esteem instead of a Saviour to deliver you from hell.
 - And there is the attempt to fit Christ in to a self-indulgent lifestyle that is like the world—
 - It is all about fulfilling your pleasures and desires rather than denying yourself and laying down your life for Christ and your neighbour.

TRANS> Christ cannot repair these broken philosophies, nor can he be contained in them.

- The new cloth will tear them and new wine will burst them.
 - The church needs to see today what it has always needed to see.
 - D. The church needs to see that Christ the bridegroom has come and everything must be subservient to Him as the One who has come to take us as His bride.
 1. Understand that the New Covenant worship remains until He returns.
 - a. Some people actually try to use today's text to teach that we need a new order for each generation.
 - In the most extreme cases, churches have separate worship services for each generation.
 - They teach that we must break out of the old mould and embrace the new ways of each generation.
 - But that is actually the very opposite of what Jesus is teaching.
 - That is what we have been doing—trying to adapt Christ to us.
 - What is taught here is not change because the people have changed, but change because Christ has come.
 - Everything was changed by God through the apostles to fit with Christ, not to fit with us.
 - It is not about fitting Him to us, but us to Him.
 - b. We are to stick to the traditions of the apostles until Jesus returns.
 - Now of course for many Christians that have been swept up into stuffy old church traditions and ceremonies,
 - they do need to break away from the old, but not to embrace more human innovations. That is what they need to leave.
 - They need to embrace the New Testament worship of the apostles.
 - We must reckon with the fact that Christ has come, and that our worship is centered around Him, not around church traditions or innovations or peoples' preferences and desires.
- But that is not all that we need to be sure of.

- There is something else we have seen today as well...
2. We must see to it that we never ever content ourselves with just keeping the outward forms.
 - True worship demands living faith that responds to our bridegroom who truly came and truly made arrangements for us to live in His Father's house...
 - And who is alive today in glory until He personally comes to receive us to Himself in marriage.
 - Until then, we have communion with Him by the Holy Spirit.
 - This is more personal than ever—because now He is with us all the time as our gracious holy Saviour and Lord.
 - You are to live in communion with Him.
 - When you sin, you should be convicted and broken so that you repent and confess your sin, looking to Him for forgiveness...
 - And you should be constantly learning of Him—of His person and His work—taking joy in a deeper and fuller comprehension of His love and grace.
 - And you should be learning and increasingly doing what pleases Him—loving Him, loving others, keeping His commandments.
 - Christ is present with us as our bridegroom.
 - That means that you take up His way and continually walk with Him in joyful responsiveness.
 3. If you are just going through the motions of your walk without connecting with Him, like the disciples of John and the Pharisees, you are in desperate need of change.
 - I will tell you where to start—with this very thing!
 - Be deeply concerned that you are out of touch with the Lord.
 - Be deeply concerned, and start crying out to Him for mercy and grace in Christ...
 - Tell Jesus that you know that He is the bridegroom who came to save and that you are coming to Him to work in you...
 - that He is the one who calls us into fuller fellowship and that you are looking to Him to produce that in you...
 - that you don't want to be like the disciples of John who were fasting and did not even notice when the LORD answered their prayers.
 - Tell Him that you want to be one who rejoices when rejoicing is in order and one who fasts when fasting is in order.
 - He is gracious, and He will hear you and you will live.