

STUDY SHEET FOR MARK 2:13-22 @ CAPC OAKLAND

LANGUAGE NOTES & TEXTUAL CONNECTIONS

The Gospel of Mark: *Author, Date, and Recipients*

It's thought that Mark's gospel is the first to be written down, using first-hand testimony (*maybe even from Peter*) as well as recorded teachings of Jesus in a hypothetical collection called Q (*Quelle* in German). Written most likely in the 60s CE around the time of the Jewish Revolt against Rome (66 CE) and the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by the Roman general Titus in 70 CE.

CROWD: ὄχλος or ochlos meaning a crowd, mob, multitude, the common people (as opposed to the elites or ruling class). Mark uses the word ochlos 38 times (a lot!) to represent the mass of people looking to and gathering around Jesus –*maybe we, as the readers of the text, are also part of this crowd.*

Follow me: ἀκολουθέω pronounced akoloutheó meaning to follow one who precedes, walk in their footsteps/or way; to someone as their attendant, fellow travelers, or disciple/student. It points back to the first use of the word in the call of the fishermen in Mark 1:17 and to the central section of the gospel in which Jesus says to the crowd: "If any wish to **come after me**, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and **follow me**. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it." Mark 8:34-35. One who follows a master-teacher is a disciple.

he sat at dinner in Levi's house:: Tables are one of the most important places of human connection. We know that table fellowship was the central expression of social connection in the ancient world. We know that the Pharisees before the destruction of the temple (70 CE) were primarily a society (like a religious rotary club of sorts) for teaching and table fellowship. From historical literature and archaeology we know that "for the oriental of antiquity every table fellowship is a guarantee of peace, trust, or brotherhood.. The oriental, to whom symbolic action means more than it does to us, would immediately understand the acceptance of the outcasts into table fellowship with Jesus as an offer of salvation to guilty sinners and as the assurance of forgiveness. Hence the objections of the Pharisees...who held that the pious could only have table fellowship with the righteous." (Jeremias in [Ched Myers](#)). By eating with with prostitutes, tax collectors, and sinners had tremendous meaning – he was elevating them to his status circle and expressing his solidarity with them. The pharisees seem less concerned with the welfare of the masses than with their own class status. ([Ched Myers, pp. 158-9](#)) Jesus repeatedly teaches not with theories but in and by meals.

tax collectors: The tax collectors were Jews who were appointed by the Roman authorities. They collected taxes for Rome and it's thought that they often charged their own people outrageous fees for themselves. This was how the Roman Empire turned people against their own people, making them collaborators. They were hated by the people and regarded as sinners. As Levi's tax collector's tent was by the lake he probably taxed the fishing industry.

sinners: ἁμαρτωλός pronounced hamartólos meaning: sinner(s). It comes from the verb hamartano meaning /hamartánō, "to forfeit by missing the mark") So properly, a sinner is one who is at a loss from falling short of what God approves, i.e. what is "wide of the mark"; a blatant sinner, one devoted to sin.

Mark 2:13-22

NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION

¹³ Jesus went out again beside the sea; the whole **CROWD** gathered around him, and he taught them. ¹⁴ As he was walking along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the *tax-collection* station, and he said to him, "**Follow me.**" And he got up and **followed him.**

¹⁵ And as he sat at dinner in Levi's house, many *tax collectors* and *sinners* were also sitting with Jesus and his **DISCIPLES**, for there were many who followed him. ¹⁶ When the **SCRIBES** and the *Pharisees* saw that he was eating with *sinners* and *tax collectors*, they said to his **DISCIPLES**, "Why does he eat with *tax collectors* and *sinners*?" ¹⁷ When Jesus heard this, he said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician but those who are sick; I have not come to call the righteous but *sinners.*"

SCRIBES:: In biblical times, scribes were in demand to prepare copies of Israel's sacred literature on parchment scrolls. Many scribes devoted themselves to preserving and copying the scriptures. Scribes studied diligently, not only to detect scribal errors but also to understand the meaning of the scriptures. After the Exile, the scribes' role expanded. They not only supplied copies of the scriptures to the synagogues, but also became teachers of the law, taking the place of the priests. (See Neh. 8:9, which describes Ezra the priest as a scribe.)

In the New Testament - particularly the Gospels - scribes were referred to as "lawyers." These "lawyers" were experts in the sacred Mosaic Law that was, in theory, the sole legislation both in civic and religious matters that governed the Jewish people. The lawyers or scribes usually were associated with the Pharisees.

Many scribes became interpreters of the law as members of the Sanhedrin, which was the highest legal and administrative body that governed Jewish life.

Pharisees:: The Pharisees promoted obedience not only to the written law of the Old Testament, but also to the oral law. The oral law were the traditions that were developed over the centuries as Israel tried to apply the scriptures to the ever changing life in Palestine. At its best it was an attempt to help people keep God's law. At its worst it was a man-made religion of works that tried to earn God's favor. The Pharisees were greatly respected by most of the Jews. The Pharisees refused to associate with those that they regarded as sinful people. They accused Jesus of blurring the lines between the righteous and the unrighteous. The past few stories in Mark 2 have involved the scribes. Here the Pharisees appear.

DISCIPLES : μαθητής pronounced mathétés meaning a learner, disciple, pupil, dedicated follower. This is the first time that this word is used in Mark's gospel.

fasting: The only fast commanded by the Torah is the Day of Atonement ([Leviticus 16:29-34](#)). But additional fasts were observed by the Pharisees, twice in the week, on Mondays and Thursdays. Fasts were also observed to commemorate historical events. ([Ched Myers, p. 159](#)). It is possible that to some extent the spiritual practice of fasting was observed as a spiritual way to hasten the justice of God – the Day or the Lord – or apocalypse – when God will make all things new. See [Isaiah 2 & 25](#).

Although such fasting was not part of the Law of Moses, by Jesus' day it had become an important expression of the Pharisees' meticulous devotion to the ceremonial law. To the Pharisees, if Jesus' disciples were not fasting, then it called into question their piety, sincerity and devotion toward the ceremonial law. Further, it called into question Jesus' attitude toward the ceremonial law. (<https://tinyurl.com/mcrbbcvf>)

The wedding attendants cannot fast while the bridegroom:: Jesus obliquely explains that He is whom the Jewish people seek. According to Jesus, it is inappropriate to mourn in the presence of the Messiah. It is a time of celebration, similar to the week-long feasts held during a Jewish wedding.

The Messiah is not referred to as a groom in the Old Testament, but the metaphor of God as the husband of Israel is common, particularly in the book of Hosea....

¹⁸ 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?" ¹⁹ Jesus said to them, "The wedding attendants cannot fast while the bridegroom is with them, can they? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. ²⁰ The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast on that day.

²¹ "No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak; otherwise, the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse **TEAR** is made. ²² Similarly, no one puts *new wine* into old wineskins; otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins, but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins."

... (see [Hosea 2:16-23](#)). John the Baptist calls the Messiah the bridegroom in John 3:29. Later the followers Jesus understand Him as the bridegroom to the church. ([Matthew 25:1-13](#); [2 Corinthians 11:2](#); [Ephesians 5:24-27](#); and [Revelation 19:7-9](#)).

new wine : in the Israeli culture of that time and place, winemaking was as common as eating and drinking. Clean water was scarce, and the climate of that area was especially favorable to viticulture, so out of necessity, wine was most often the drink at meals

To make wine, grapes were harvested dried in the sun, then crushed and stored in large stone vats to ferment for four to seven days. After that, the wine would be strained and stored in wineskins or jars to complete fermentation. Because **new wine** continued to ferment and emit gas inside its container, it was therefore crucial for it to be stored in new, supple wineskins. That way, the flexible nature of the wine container would allow it to expand and stay sealed as the fermentation process progressed.

The idea of putting new wine in an old, inflexible wineskin would've been regarded as foolishly wasteful because the old, dried-out wineskin would simply crack and drain out all of the new wine. Like old fabric (already shrunk) applied to new fabric (yet to shrink) Jesus uses these metaphors to talk of the destructive consequences of mixing the old and new.

TEAR : σχίσμα, pronounced schisma meaning a split, tear (in a garment), dissension or division among people.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & EXAMEN:

- What engaged, enraged, or surprised you in the text?
- Why are the scribes and pharisees so upset about Jesus eating with sinners and tax collectors?
- Can you think of other gospel stories that happen around meals or a dinner table?
- Jesus talks about mixing the old with the new as an action that has destructive consequences. The cloth is destroyed. The wineskins burst and the new wine is lost. What is he saying in the context of these stories in which the Pharisees are complaining about his disciples not fasting (observing spiritual practices) and him eating with the wrong people?
- What's the "new thing" that Jesus is doing and invited others to do by following him as disciples? How do you understand that in the context of this text? How do you understand that in our world and context today? What "old wineskin" is Jesus inviting us to jettison in order to welcome the "new wine" of what God is up to in our world today?
- What invitation do you hear the Spirit of God speaking to you – or to us, as a church – to act, speak, be, or change, through this word of scripture?