

FOLLOWING IN THE WAY:

The Gospel of Mark

Fit

MARK 2:18-3:35

(9/27/26)



think of a rule from their own past — church, family, or work — that made complete sense in its original context but became awkward once circumstances changed, and ask how they knew it was time to let it go.

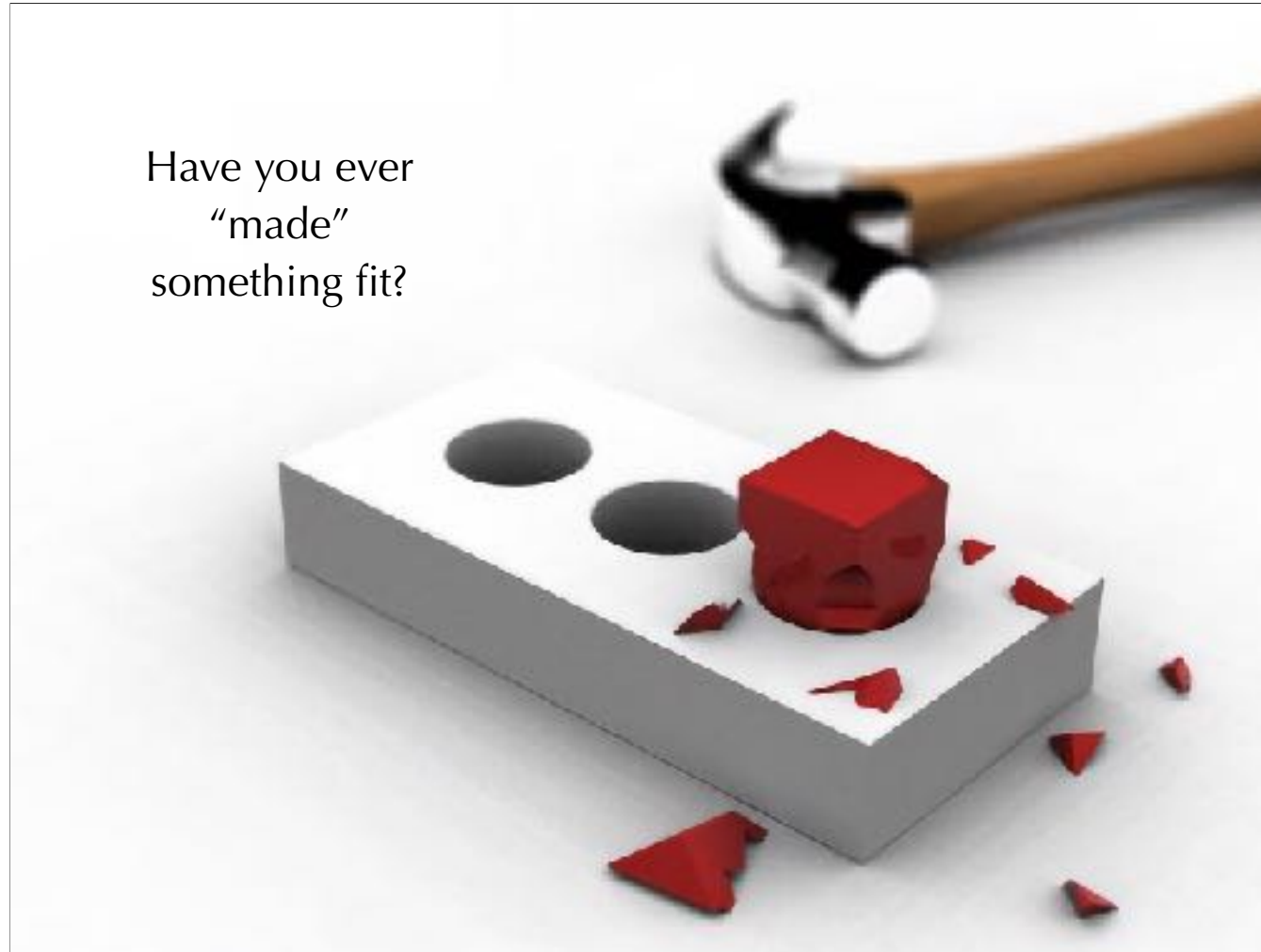


Do you have something in your closet that no longer fits you?

Do you have something in your closet that no longer fits you?

This is mine. It is the suit I left from our wedding over 50 years ago. If you think I can fit in that, you are deluded!

Have you ever
“made”
something fit?



But the second question is have you ever “made” something fit?

I have learned that most men have a problem. If it doesn't fit, get a hammer and smack it. You can usually force any thing to fit with enough violence.



Mark 2:18-3:35
Things that Don't Fit the Kingdom

In today's lesson, we are going to get into the spiritual closet and see what doesn't fit. Jesus encounters many people who want to hammer in old ways into the kingdom and he reminds us that those are incompatible.

A Look at the Landscape

Why don't you fit it?

Mismatched Pictures

Sabbath Tests

Jesus...God or Satan?



In this lesson, we will see many things happen. The entire passage revolves around confrontations the Jewish leaders and others have with Jesus. The leaders keep asking, “why don’t you fit in with what we all do? And Jesus answers because the pictures don’t match. This comes in two tests of the “rules” of the Sabbath which ends with the leaders accusing Jesus of being an agent of Satan and closing their eyes to the reality of who he really is...to their detriment.



The “Teachings”

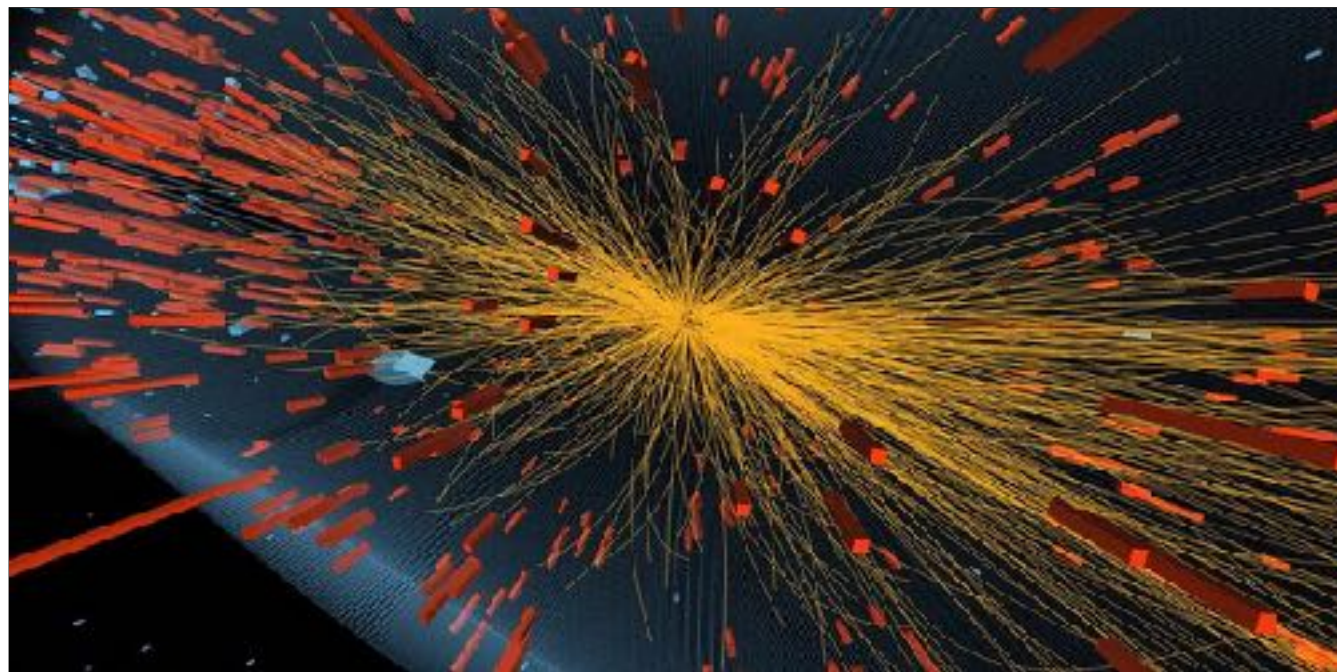
Defines How You Obey God
what was “righteous” and what was “sinful.”

But we need to start with the cultural background we need to grasp what is the real issue. If not, it will be like waking up in a hotel room and not realizing where you are.

The big issue is the “The Teachings”. The word means “instructions” and it defined how a Jew was to obey God.

Jewish teachers also developed an extensive body of interpretation and tradition explaining how the Torah should be applied to everyday life. These teachings were largely passed down orally from teacher to student.

Over time, they would solidify into Mishnah and Talmud but it was the basis for daily life in Judaism and defined what was “righteous” and what was “sinful.”



Two Forces Collide: Jewish Tradition and Kingdom Coming

This would bring Jesus into collision with the teachers because, being God, he was there to uncover and teach what God really intended for people, not just the accepted. He would always be out of step. Indeed, Christianity is always out of step...it is out of step with what acceptable religious practice is regardless.



“Now John’s disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. Some people came and asked Jesus, “How is it that John’s disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?”” (Mark 2:18, NIV)

The first flareup occurs over the practice of fasting. The people observed that everyone...the Pharisees and the disciples of John all fast. But Jesus and his disciples did not. Why not? The real question is “why are you not keeping the traditions of the elders?”

Only one specified...Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:24)

Tradition Specified More

2x per week on Mondays and Thursdays

““When you fast, ***do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting.*** Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.” (Matthew 6:16, NIV)

Defines “good Jew”

But the reality of fasting was it was not commanded except one time a year....on the Day of Atonement. Nothing else was specified. But over time, Jewish teachers incorporated into scheduled practices. (For instance, what is the proper time for Sunday worship...we have solidified it into a time...the story of the sign in front of the church at Santa Fe.)

It became a twice a week tradition...Mondays and Thursdays. (BTW, when Christianity came, Jewish Christians, wanting to differentiate themselves, fasted on Tuesday and Friday. But it was so ingrained that is what you did.)

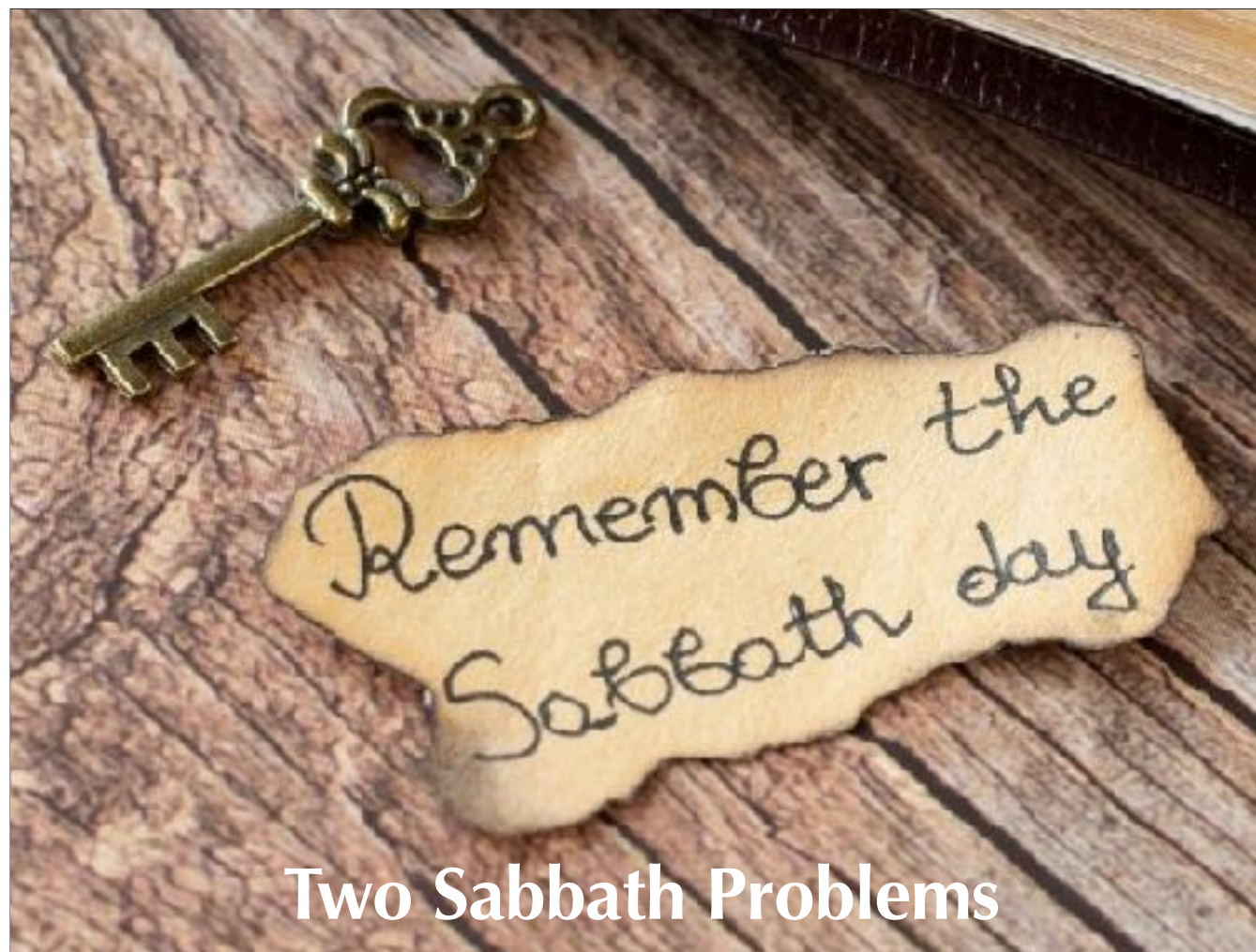
It made Jews somber and sad. It became a religion marked by remorse, regret, and pain. Little joy could be found. In fact, when they fasted, they would make their faces look grotesque to make it appear they were miserable.

Good Jews fasted. Backsliders didn't. It was a simple rule.

“Jesus answered, “How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them. But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast.”
(Mark 2:19–20, NIV)

Jesus answers with an analogy. No one at a wedding feast fasts...it is a time of joy and feasting because the bridegroom (the main figure in weddings who hosted the party) was present. Once he left, they could do what they pleased. The wedding in which attendants are relieved of all religious observances that would lose their joy.

Jesus says that fasting is fine if it fits the circumstances but it is not kingdom related but life related.



Two Sabbath Problems

But then two more clashes take place, both of these on the Sabbath.

“Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy,
because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he
had done.” (Genesis 2:3, NIV)

Sabbath means “rest”

Sabbath is a Hebrew word which means rest. (It doesn't mean seventh which is what some preachers said when I was young.) In the Hebrew calendar based in the Law of Moses, it was a religious celebration that took place on Saturday due to this passage in Gen 2:3. Seventh day God “shabbath.”

Note: the Sabbath was part of creation, not the creation of the law of Moses. God still expects us and made us to rest regularly. The things that violate rest is a problem.

The issue was what constituted rest?

Jewish teachers therefore tried to answer practical questions:- How far may someone walk?

- Can food be prepared? (Spoon yes, fork no because you push with a fork.)
- Can something be carried from one place to another?
- Can an animal be helped?
- Can a sick person be treated?
- Can grain be picked and eaten?

Over time, a detailed body of interpretation developed to help people avoid accidentally violating the Sabbath.
Later rabbinic tradition classified 39 major categories of prohibited labor.

“One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him, *“Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?”*” (Mark 2:23–24, NIV)

The Pharisees observed the dissonance. The disciples were hungry so they were passing through a wheat field and popped off a head of grain, warmed it by rolling it in their hands before eating it.

Sounds innocent, but not to Pharisees. They were violating the Sabbath by both harvesting and preparing to eat.

Their question was “why are you doing what is unlawful?”

“He answered, “*Have you never read* what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions.”” (Mark 2:25–26, NIV)

Jesus answers with a dilemma. The Jews held David in the highest esteem as the focal point of their entire political and social system. Jesus asked, “are you so ignorant” (that shames them into having to acknowledge the story). It comes from 1 Samuel when David is fleeing from Saul and he comes to the tent of meeting where he and his men need food. Abiathar, the high priest appointed by God, knows the rules. Only the priests ate the bread on the table. But he gives it to them anyway because they are hungry.

If Abiathar and David don’t hold to this so tightly, why are the Pharisees. Try to untie that Gordian knot.

“Then 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.”” (Mark 2:27–28, NIV)

Jesus responds two ways.

One is that God made the Sabbath to help people, not to hinder them. Don't make the Sabbath more important than what God says.

But the second is a killer....I am the Lord of the Sabbath. I can change it as needed because I govern it.

They got the point and were fuming but needed more evidence.

“Another time Jesus went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath.” (Mark 3:1–2, NIV)

On another Sabbath, Jesus was in the synagogue. A man with a shriveled hand comes. Would Jesus do something for him or not. They knew what they, the officials would do...they would ignore the man and tell him to come back later.

So they were focused on what Jesus would do.

“Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, “Stand up in front of everyone.” Then Jesus asked them, “Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?” But they remained silent. He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored.” (Mark 3:3–5, NIV)

Jesus knows his so he wants to teach a lesson. He wants everyone to see this and confront what is real.

Again, a dilemma. (Jesus never lets your thinking stay simplistic.)

Which is lawful..to kill or save? Do good or do evil?

The Pharisees knew the answer but knew they could not respond. Jesus was holding the knife and letting them wiggle their throat on it.

Jesus had two emotions...anger and distress at their refusal to even try to comprehend what God really wanted. He hated their closed minds worse than their closed mouths.

The one thing that irritates Jesus the most are people who refused to want to see the truth and remain blinded.

Their silence was the answer.

So the man stretches out his hand it was restored. Doesn't say Jesus did it, but it is obvious from the result what happened.

“Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.” (Mark 3:6, NIV)

And now, after all of this, the talk of forgiveness, the refusal to fast, the demolishing of the Sabbath norms, and healing on the Sabbath, they had to put away this cancer from the Jews, lest it spread. So they plotted with the Herodians. They hated each other but as the saying goes, politics makes strange bedfellows. So they would give up their principles to assuage their hatred of Jesus. "we're jumping past the crowds and the appointing of the Twelve for time"

“And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, “He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons.”” (Mark 3:22, NIV)



They accuse him of being the agent of Satan. He is supposedly under the influence of Beelzebub (the Philistine Lord of the Flies) which has empowered him to cast out demons.

“So Jesus called them over to him and began to speak to them in parables: “How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come. In fact, no one can enter a strong man’s house without first tying him up. Then he can plunder the strong man’s house.” (Mark 3:23–27, NIV)

Jesus demolishes the theory that evil loves evil, not hates it so it is inconsistent. A house divided against itself cannot stand.

But for the Pharisees they had to employ fearmongering to justify what they were saying.

“Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin.” He said this because they were saying, “He has an impure spirit.”” (Mark 3:28–30, NIV)

It is here, we come to a passage that bothers people...you can be forgiven for every sin but one. There is an unforgivable sin.



People who are scared that they have “crossed the line.” My story of having to deal with the man who was sure he was going to hell because at sometimes, he had doubts about his faith and felt he had blasphemed against the Holy Spirit. He said this while standing in a pew at church on Sunday. I had to point out several things to him.

“He looked around at them in anger and, *deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts*, said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored.” (Mark 3:5, NIV)

“He said this because they were saying, “*He has an impure spirit.*”” (Mark 3:30, NIV)

It is a settled posture against Christ that refuses to change.

It is unforgivable because you have closed yourself off to that which can forgive you.

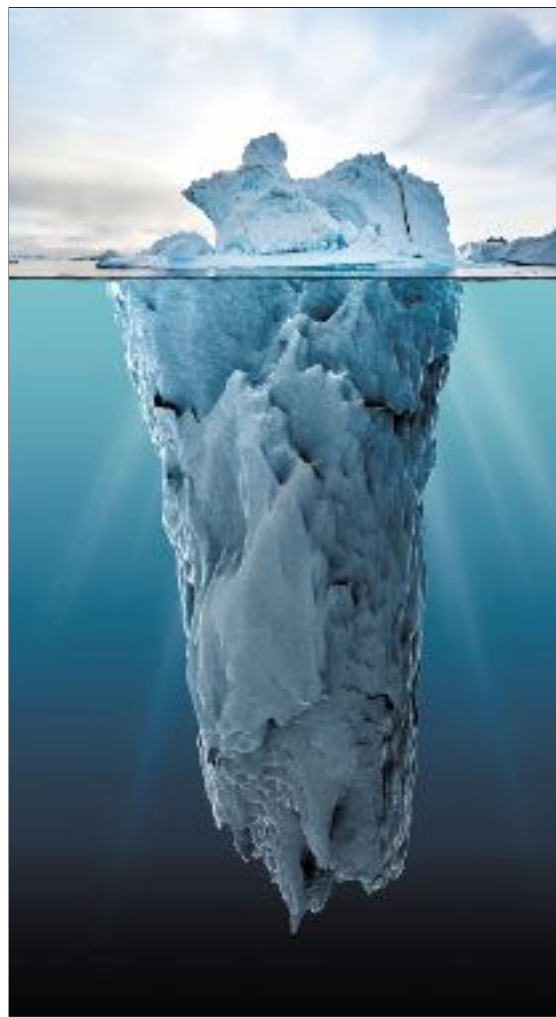
The context is important. Remember Jesus was angry and distressed at their stubborn hearts.

They accused him of being in league with the Devil.

The problem we have is that we consider sin an action when in reality, it can be an attitude. When the Old Testament prophets condemned the people for their sin, it wasn't a specific thing they did, but the tenor of their lives to ignore God.

In this passage, it is a settled posture against Christ that refuses to change.

It is unforgivable because you shut the door on the truth that is sent to forgive you. It is unforgivable because you don't believe you need to be forgiven and therefore do not act. In 2 Peter, Peter says that God is forbearing but not eternally forbearing.



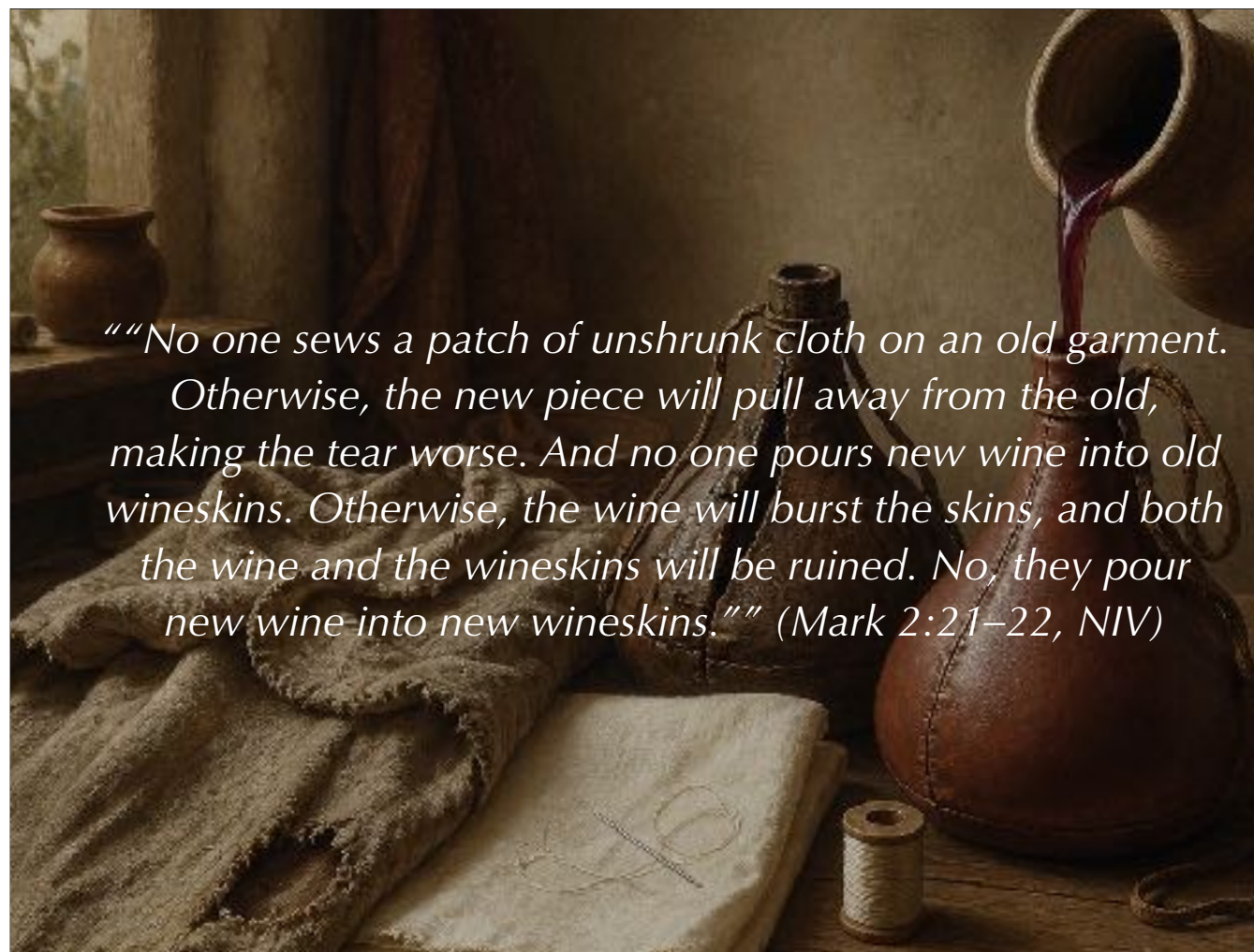
So What is the Real Problem?

So what's the real problem addressed in this passage and in our class today? Is it we don't have to fast or ignore the Sabbath, or condemn the Pharisees?

It's different and more basic.

Sometimes, we come to a passage like this and we say, "it's how they saw the Law." That absolves us pretty easily because we don't do that. But if this is applicable to us today, what is the problem that it keeps poking us with.

It is like an iceberg. What you see is above the water, but the danger is beneath it.



“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. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins.” (Mark 2:21–22, NIV)

The point of this lesson comes from two illustrations in Mark 2:21-22. "let's go back to something Jesus said right after the fasting question"

When I was young, my mother sewed (which was true about many, it is an art that being lost today due to cheap and disposable goods.)

But she would buy four yards of cloth, usually cotton. Before she would sew anything, she would wash it. I did not understand that very much then but I do now. The cotton shrunk. If you sewed it first and then washed it, it would rip the fabric at the seams.

If you took new patch and put it on an old garment, the first cleaning would rip it apart. You put new things on new garments, not new things on old ones.



A wineskin was a skin of an animal in which wine was put to ferment. Over time, the skins would get dry and rigid. And wine, over time, ferments and expands. So to put new wine which is expanding in an old skin which won't take a new shape, it will cause an explosion.

This is the problem with Mentos in a diet coke. (Tell my story about Harrison.)

Some view
Jesus as an
iconoclast
who came to
smash up all
of the old
ways.



There are some who believed that Jesus was an iconoclast kicking over the traditions just because they were traditional.

You meet people all the time who believe that all tradition, all settled practice is wrong and someone needs to throw a hand grenade into the church service and blow it up.

Old is bad and new is good

New songs and old songs

New worship styles and traditional styles

**But many times it comes out to we do what suits us,
not what is suitable to the Kingdom.**

Some believe it simply means: old is bad, new is good. So get rid of old traditions, old ways. Just burn it all down and start over. That was the premise of a magazine that was popular among college students when I was in college. It was called Wineskins.

It believed that all of the traditions and structures of the church of their elders needed tearing down. And therefore, we are in the shape we are today in many places.

We need to sing only new songs and quit with any song that is more than 2 years old. We need new wine in new wineskins.

We need new worship styles where we dance in the aisles and treat worship like a football prep rally and quit sitting in pews and even quit having buildings. New wine in new wineskins.

The gospel demands a complete overhaul every Sunday!

But many times it comes out that we use this as an excuse to suit us, not to do what is suitable to the kingdom.

Jesus never discards the Sabbath, but only puts it back to its rightful place.

Jesus is not against fasting, but says it should be appropriate to the situation.

When you examine this passage it says some things clearly. Jesus never discards the Sabbath, but only puts it back in its rightful place as something that helped people live in accordance with God. You do what fits the message of forgiveness, mercy, and new life.

Jesus was not against fasting but says it should be appropriate to the situation. Not prescribed but prompted by a heart seeking clarification or sorrow or repentance which naturally prompt it. But the kingdom is about the joy of God's love and forgiveness so don't impose your narrow view on others.



Does it **fit** what Christ is doing with his kingdom?

Jesus only asks a simple question. Does what you do fit with what he is doing in his kingdom?

It is more practical than it seems. I have come up against situations in the past which someone has really messed up their life and the talk I was hearing around the church could be kind of severe, of we need to avoid the stain of sin. But I had to ask a different question...what is redemptive right now? Because Christ came to be redemptive. What fits with what Christ is doing in his kingdom?



Jesus is making us
into something
beyond measure.

Salvation is not about reformation of behavior. He is creating something no one can even imagine.



So two questions as we close. Where do want the message to change to fit you rather than you to fit the message?

Many people love to make Christianity into a custom made garment that I can alter to fit the way I want to live (or worse, imposed on others their personal tastes.) Where is that happening in your life?