

## Breaking the Rules: Mark 2:13-3:6

---

Story after story here in Mark give us insight into who Jesus was on this earth. And honestly, hearing these stories, well, it's not how I'm raising my children. It's not even how I strive to be as an adult. Look at these stories. Sure, we've heard the story of Jesus eating with tax collectors and sinners enough that it doesn't alarm us anymore. But these were people who made a living out of swindling others out of their hard-earned money. These weren't nice IRS agents taking only what is owed to the government, these were people who added as much as they could to what was owed to the government only to pocket the extra for themselves. That was how they made money. They cheated and lied literally for a living. And the sinners Mark is referring to, well, let's just say they weren't the type you'd want to bring home to meet your parents.

I remember in second grade not being able to go to a friend's birthday party because my friend's dad worked at a restaurant that served alcohol. My friend's dad was the manager of a restaurant in town that had a bar in it, therefore that friend might have been a bad influence on me, so I wasn't able to go to her party.

That friend was nothing but nice to me, a model second-grade student. But her affiliation to her dad made her a possible bad influence. And here, in this story, Jesus himself is eating with con artists, drunkards, money lenders, and prostitutes. Just eating with them. He's not preaching to them or teaching them how to turn their life around. He's telling them the kingdom of heaven is for everyone. It's for you, he says. Talk about affiliation.

Mark proceeds to then point out that Jesus and his disciples weren't fasting. Others are fasting. John and his disciples, even the Pharisees are fasting. How come you aren't fasting Jesus? And Jesus doesn't even give an answer they could understand, he just talks about bridegrooms and wineskins. So we have this man that travels around speaking to large crowds and healing people, but he's also meeting with low-class members of society and is ignoring spiritual practices. This doesn't sound like the great leader we're looking to imitate. In fact, it sounds like a lot of the politicians that fill our news feeds. They go out speaking to large crowds, giving hope and encouragement. Then they're seen having coffee or dinner with someone whose endorsement isn't wanted and they avoid directly answering any questions that are asked.

Why is Mark telling us these stories? Why isn't he building Jesus up to the role model we strive to raise the next generation to become? We tell kids to be kind to everyone. To show everyone respect and dignity. We tell them to befriend others who are all alone. But we don't tell them to go eat with the school bully. On Wednesday nights before our youth meal, we always ask, who wants to give thanks for our meal? Every Wednesday night the whole group looks around the circle waiting to see what brave soul is going to volunteer. We don't say, oh, nobody wants to pray, that's ok, let's just eat then. No, even

though it takes a little extra time waiting for someone to volunteer, we still continue to incorporate that spiritual practice each week. So why is Mark telling us this?

It isn't until this third story that Mark shares that these previous two stories begin making more sense. At first glance, Jesus appears to be nothing more than a rule breaker, someone with no real spiritual connection, someone we wouldn't have been able to associate with for fear he would have been a bad influence on us. But in this third story, Mark tells of Jesus breaking rules in a different way. This time, when Jesus breaks the rules it's to heal someone. It's good. It's obviously, blatantly good. And we realize that goodness triumphs over everything else. It's in that moment we remember that people are all people. Both the swindlers and the saints have the same needs. We all come with titles and labels. Affiliations around Jesus' table should all be positive, regardless all are always welcome. Jesus made time to get to know people, all kinds of people. That is goodness. Even if it took us pulling the plank out of our eye before noticed it. Jesus' actions were good. And spiritual disciplines can be done anytime. There's no set time you have to do something. Anytime prayers and practices are done, God is there.

Love really does win, but unfortunately not everyone can see the big picture. Here we've only gotten through the sixth verse in the third chapter and already Jesus has shaken up the rules and normalcy enough to scare those who are in control. People in control like to remain in control and if anyone threatens their livelihood, they exterminate them. And here, already at the beginning of the third chapter they're plotting how to destroy Jesus.

Already?! It's a shame, I feel like we're just starting to get to know him.