

“The Joys of Christ”
Mark 2:18-22
(Preached at Trinity, October 7, 2009)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As I’ve pointed out before, this section of Mark contains five narratives that are probably not in chronological order or even the same period of Christ’s ministry but Mark probably places them together because of their common theme – conflict with the scribes and Pharisees.
 - A. In the first section the scribes accused Jesus of blaspheme because He forgave the sins of the paralytic.
Mark 2:7 – “Why doth this *man* thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only?”
 - B. After Jesus called Matthew the scribes and Pharisees criticized Jesus for consorting with sinners.
Mark 2:16 – “And when the scribes and Pharisees saw him eat with publicans and sinners, they said unto his disciples, How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners?”
2. As we come to **Verse 18** it would seem that the Pharisees along with the disciples of John the Baptist were taking offense with Jesus and His disciples because they weren’t fasting.
Mark 2:18 – “Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but thy disciples fast not?”
3. While Mark’s account here lacks any reference to time or chronological order it could be that that this passage before us follows the previous chronologically. If so, the disciples of John came to Jesus with the question of fasting at the very time Jesus and His disciples are feasting at Matthew’s house.
4. Some translations translate **Verse 18**, “And people came” or “some people came.”
 - A. This clouds the meaning of the passage by leaving us in doubt as to the identity of those who were complaining that Jesus and His disciples are not fasting.
 - B. The KJV and NAS keep the meaning clear. It is the Pharisees and the disciples of John who are taking issue with Jesus.
5. This passage would have taken place after John the Baptist had been taken into custody by Herod Antipas.
Mark 1:14 – “Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, A. Even after John’s imprisonment his disciples continued as a distinct group.”
 - A. After Jesus arrived on the scene many of John’s disciples began to follow Christ.
John 1:35-37 – “Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; ³⁶ And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God! ³⁷ And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.”
 - B. One of John’s disciples who turned to Christ was Andrew.
 - C. There were many however who remained loyal to John the Baptist. These were not necessarily followers of Christ.

- D. John the Baptist did not support such loyalty to himself although “John the Baptist” groups would continue for centuries.
Matthew 3:11 – “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and *with fire*.”
John 3:30 – “He must increase, but I *must* decrease.”
6. The confusion of John’s disciples is not completely surprising. Even John the Baptist was confused as to the identity of Jesus.
Matthew 11:2 – “Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?”
- a. John had pictured Jesus as One who had come to punish and destroy.
Matthew 3:7 – “But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?”
Matthew 3:11-12 – “he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and *with fire*: ¹² Whose fan *is* in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”
- b. John was right in this but did not understand that this would be fulfilled at Jesus’ second coming. At His first advent, however, Jesus came as the suffering servant to seek and save that which was lost.
John 3:17 – “For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.”
- c. Now John’s disciples are confused when they see Jesus and His disciples feasting and making merry.
To their credit, they approach Jesus directly and frankly, in contrast to the Pharisees (see verses 8,16).
7. The first thing we must see in this passage is the shock and dismay of the Pharisees and the disciples of John that Jesus and His disciples were filled with joy and mirth.
8. There are two types of people in this world – those who are followers of Christ who have found Him the greatest of treasures and have forsaken all else to have Him, and those who continue in rejection of God and His Law.
To the one group we find the promise of life and eternal fellowship with Christ.
To the other group we find judgment and eternal torment in hell.
9. But among the lost there are many different types. There are many different ways to manifest hatred toward God. Some deny Him outright. Others enter into religion and pretend all is well with their soul. It is a joyless religion, however.
- A. I’m not talking about brief external expressions of joy or feeling that a particular meeting might create. It isn’t difficult to create moments of intense excitement.
Watch Tiger Stadium when the Tigers come from behind to win.
- B. There is no abiding joy that presses on in spite of earthly circumstances.
10. Such joyless religious people tend to be highly critical and censorious. This is because they develop certain rules and regulations that they become proud of keeping and then criticize others for not keeping them.
11. This is what we are seeing in this passage. The Pharisees and the disciples of John would have been well acquainted with fasting. We’ll look more at their fasting next time. What they did not have was any sense of the joy that comes with knowing Christ.

- A. Was there any joy with the healing of the paralytic man? Was it not wonderful that this man who had been confined to a bed was now able to take care of himself? All they could do is criticize.
- B. Was there any joy in the changed life of Matthew or of those who came to sup with Christ? All they could do is criticize.
- C. They were completely unable to partake of the joys of knowing Christ.
12. How about you? Is Christianity just a religion for you or have you found the joys of knowing Christ?
- A. John spoke of this joy:
1 John 1:3-4 – “That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. ⁴ And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.”
- B. Peter spoke of this joy in the context of suffering.
1 Peter 1:7-8 – “That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: ⁸ Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see *him* not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.”
- C. Over and over we are told that the Christian has joy even in the face of suffering.
Matthew 5:11-12 – “Blessed are ye, when *men* shall revile you, and persecute *you*, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. ¹² Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great *is* your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.”
13. Because of this joy in Christ we are able to love and encourage one another. Because our religion is a relationship with Christ we don’t find the harsh hyper-critical heart that accompanies dead religion.
- A. A hyper-critical spirit is inconsistent with Christianity.
1 Corinthians 13:5 – “(Love) Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;”
- B. The Pharisees could not appreciate the joy of Jesus and His disciples. All they could do is criticize.
- C. With the resurrection and the New Covenant we have unspeakable joy in Christ.
14. May God fill us more and more with His unspeakable joy.