

Jesus and the Jewish Leaders

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[0 : 0 0] Okay, let's pray and check out this part of God's Word together. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we do thank you for bringing us to this day. Thank you for the freedom we have to gather as your people, to hear your Word and respond appropriately.

Please help us to understand it well this morning as we seek to live to your praise and glory. We ask you in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, the questions that we ask reveal what's going on in our hearts.

The two-year-old asks the question, why? Why, Mum? Why, Dad? They keep asking why. And that can be for two different reasons. Sometimes they're generally interested wanting to know why.

Or other times it might be just because they're being defiant. I do not want to actually do what you're asking me to do. Some questions are genuinely inquisitive, wanting to know why.

Some questions are condescending, thinking I know better than you when you ask the question. And some questions are seeking clarity about matters. And some questions are seeking to trap people in their words.

[1 : 0 6] As we come to this part of God's Word here this morning, we see four questions. Well, three questions plus one implied question from the Pharisees to Jesus or his disciples.

And so let's have a look at them. We see these questions. The last question is probably a joint project question. Anyway, the first question, why does Jesus eat with sinners?

Verses 13 to 17. And Jesus gives the answer because he came to call sinners. Case in point, Levi. Levi. Now, Levi is a tax collector.

And you wouldn't get a more despised and corrupt person in Israel than a tax collector. No one in history likes paying tax. You included.

And which is why the people of today pay huge amounts of money to find every reason, every loophole, why we shouldn't be paying the tax and trying to avoid it.

[2 : 0 9] The tax collector, Levi, was a Jew, right? Who collects money from other Jews to give to the Romans. That's what the tax collectors did. And the more money he gets off the people, the more money he gets to keep for himself.

And so he's a traitor to his own people in his own land, which is ruled by the Romans. The tax collector was someone despised by his own people.

And yet Jesus calls him. And notice immediately this bloke gets up and follows Jesus. Now, it's more than likely that this man is known as Matthew, one of the 12 disciples.

Levi, from the tribe of Levi, and Levi would be the Hebrew name, and Matthew would be the Greek name, for the same person. And the next thing we see is that Levi, sorry, Jesus, is at Levi's house reclining, right?

And Levi's invited other tax collectors and sinners to his house as well. And Jesus is eating with them and reclining and relaxing with them as well. We learn he's eating with them, which is something no respectable Jew would do with a Gentile, let alone a tax collector.

[3 : 22] With sinners, people who reject the authority of God and who live in rebellion against him. Now, this absolutely shocks the Pharisees. Now, some of the Pharisees we see here are scribes.

It's a subset of the Pharisees. They are the ones who are experts in the law. And they would know Psalm 1, or you would know Psalm 1. Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the way of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers.

And yet here is Jesus associating with sinners. Now, eating is more than filling your face at the dinner table, right? Jesus is having a banquet, reclining with sinners, reclining with them.

And it's a foretaste of heaven, if you like. Joyful friendship over a meal. Jesus is giving some kind of picture of heaven when God and man will sit down to eat together.

Now, if you saw me at a banquet with gangsters and drug dealers and prostitutes, what would you think of me?

[4 : 36] Important thing to note, right? Jesus is not being led astray by these people into their sin. Levi is the first one who's been called out of his sin and is now a follower of Jesus.

And the situation is not what the Pharisees see. They look down on these people as unrepentant refugees of the world, right? But Jesus, the physician, goes to where the sick people are to bring them God's word.

Unlike the Pharisee who would just simply stand at a distance and say, you're beyond the pale. Let me tell you a bit about calling.

First and foremost, calling. Jesus calls people out of sin and into the kingdom of God. That's what he does. Jesus calls people from death to life.

That's what Jesus does. Jesus calls people out of darkness into light, the light of life. Jesus doesn't call people primarily from a position in society to another position in society.

[5 : 53] See, no one will become a follower of Jesus unless Jesus first calls them to himself. The disciples, we read, have been called to follow Jesus.

In Romans chapter 1 verse 6, you who are called to belong to Christ. The same thing goes on in Romans 8 and 1 Corinthians chapter 1 and 1 Corinthians chapter 7.

And Galatians chapter 1 verse 6 speaks about calling people to be his followers. And if Levi can be called a follower of Jesus, no one is beyond redemption.

It isn't a matter of being good enough and then becoming a follower of Jesus. It's all about Jesus calling you from where you are to leave that behind to be in the kingdom of God, to follow him.

And Jesus is still alive today, calling sinners to follow him. And those who hear his call and do not harden their hearts against him, when they do hear his voice and follow him, that is to be blessed.

[7 : 03] The greatest way he could ever be blessed, to move from death to life. And Jesus calls people to follow him, calls sinners to follow him. If the world was full of righteous people, there'd be no need for Jesus to have come.

At all. Jesus had no reason to come, but he did. And the Pharisee, the one who is the law-abiding, upstanding citizen, in the eyes of the world, needs to recognise that they are sinners too.

The Pharisee thinks he doesn't need a physician. But they are really, really wrong. The truth is, you will know from Romans chapter 3, verses 10 to 12, no one is righteous, no not one.

No one understands, no one seeks for God. All have turned aside. Together they become worthless. No one does good, not even one. It's an empty set of those who are God's people, who haven't been called to follow him.

It's a full set, the whole world. No one is righteous on their own. That's normal, sinful humanity.

[8 : 14] No one is righteous. And it's normal, sinful humanity that Jesus calls to himself by his word. And you and I are proof of it.

Those of us who have submitted to Jesus, Lord and Saviour, have responded to his call to repent and believe that the kingdom of God is near. Now, wouldn't it be wonderful? Wouldn't it be wonderful if we saw more and more people coming to follow Jesus from all walks and talks of life, hearing news of people who have become believers in Jesus, every Sunday someone was new here each week, or more than one, two or three.

That would be fabulous. And that would be just the start in our world. Jesus comes to call sinners to himself. Sinners who are all around about us.

Lost and facing, being shut out of the presence of God for all eternity. Missing out on the banquet of glory.

And the next question the Pharisees ask is, well, why don't your disciples fast? And the answer? Well, it's not right to fast while the bridegroom is with them.

[9 : 29] We come across the Pharisees again. Not quite so clear, but it is. This time it's a matter of fasting. That's the idea of going something, usually going without food. In the first century, apparently it was common for the Pharisees to fast on Monday and Thursday.

They were the two days you would fast. And then you would let the whole world know that you were fasting by walking around with a sombre face and saying, how well is me, I'm hungry. And yet it seems that the Pharisees have complained that the disciples of Jesus are not fasting.

They're not mourning. They're not going without food. And the Pharisees are wondering, why Jesus? Aren't they religious people? And Jesus answers the question with a question, can a wedding guest fast while the bridegroom is still present?

And the answer is, no. That'd be totally inappropriate. So the implication is that Jesus is the bridegroom. That's the implication.

And so why does Jesus answer this way? What does the Old Testament say about bridegroom, particularly if the kingdom of God is at hand? That's the question we should be asking.

[10 : 42] Now, in Isaiah chapter 62, the bridegroom is God. Not only is Jesus the bridegroom of the Messianic kingdom, the bridegroom is no one less than God.

And as Isaiah speaks about the hope of Israel being saved, being rescued, being brought back, having a glorious future, he says this in Isaiah chapter 62, verses 4 and 5.

You shall no more be termed forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed desolate. But you shall be called, my delight is in her, and your land married.

For the Lord delights in you, and your land shall be married. For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your sons marry you. And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.

Did you get it? As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God delight over you. Jesus is saying he's nothing less than the bridegroom who is God. The bridegroom rejoices over the bride, he is saved and called to himself.

[11 : 49] The Messianic expectation of the Old Testament are all coming to fulfilment in Jesus. The bridegroom of bridegrooms is here, and the wedding and feast of the Lord is at hand.

It's not time now to fast. However, even now, right? Verse 20. Even now. Jesus speaks about it in Mark chapter 2. The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day.

It'll be totally appropriate then, won't it? Because the time will come when he's taken away from them in death, and then they will mourn appropriately, then they will fast, as you're supposed to, and it'll be entirely appropriate.

It won't be just for a religious show of appearance. It'll be from profound and appropriate grief. When the bridegroom is there, there's time to rejoice.

Now, where there's a bridegroom, there's also a wedding feast. And Jesus is on about something new, doubly new coming up here, verses 31 to 33. 21 to 33.

[13 : 03] No one sews... 23, sorry. No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the patch will wear away. The new from the old, and a worse tear is made.

And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is destroyed, and so are the skins. But new wine is for fresh wineskins. The Old Testament expectation is that there will be a wine flowing in glorious quantities in the kingdom of God when it comes.

Joel chapter 2 speaks about it. Amos chapter 9, I'll read it out to you. Amos chapter 9, verse 13. Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when the ploughman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes who will sow the seed.

The mountains will drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them.

They shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit. There's just time coming when you can't keep up with the amount of wine that's going to be around.

[14 : 09] The mountains flowing with it. The crops abounding in prosperity. Jesus is saying, you can't repair the old with something new. Otherwise, you destroy both.

You can't put what is new into something that is old. Otherwise, you destroy something with both. Jesus is saying that the new age is dawning. The kingdom of God is coming.

You can't stitch the new age onto the old age. You can't put the new age into the old age. You can't stitch the new covenant onto the old covenant.

You'll destroy them both. You can't put the new covenant into the old covenant. You'll destroy them both. What Jesus is doing is bringing about the Messianic kingdom of God, which brings something new.

He's bringing in the new age, bringing in the kingdom of God, the new covenant. But while he's with them in person, it's not time to fast.

[15 : 09] That day is going to come. Well, the next question is, why do your disciples break the Sabbath? And the answer is, the Sabbath is made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So, one Sabbath, Jesus is in the fields.

And the Pharisees see disciples picking heads of grain. My question is, how is it that the Pharisees know what these guys are doing? Is it like they're sort of hiding behind trees, watching what Jesus is doing, trying to find out the next thing he does wrong?

Spying on these guys, keeping tabs on them. What are you guys going to do next? The Sabbath is the seventh day of the Hebrew week, and on it you will not do any work.

That's the fourth commandment. Exodus chapter 20, verse 8. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work.

The Sabbath is good for mankind. Now, the Pharisees had 39 laws to help them keep the Sabbath, you know.

[16 : 14] So, you don't want to break the rule. When you make a few more rules around about, you say you don't get close to breaking the rule. That's what they do. One of them was, you shall do no reaping.

Now, if Jesus and the disciples are plucking grain, well then they're saying they're guilty of reaping and so working on the Sabbath day. Now, is that good or is that bad?

Well, it depends. Jesus says that there's a precedent in this. Consider David. At the day that he and his friends did something possibly more offensive in the days of Abiathar.

The bread of the presence was being replaced in 1 Samuel chapter 21 and usually the priest would get it. But David requested it for him and for his men and famished as they were from fleeing good old Saul.

David was no priest but David was king. He was a type of Messiah. And Jesus ratchets up the expectations of the Sabbath day here though.

[17 : 26] For in calling himself Son of Man he is saying that he is Lord of the Sabbath. He's equating himself as Lord, as God, as Yahweh.

That's who he's equating himself with. And the Sabbath that the Son of Man will rule will be the Sabbath rest in the new creation in the kingdom of God. That's the eternal Sabbath rest of the Lord which we'll hear about in Hebrews chapter 4.

The rest which was foreshadowed when the people of God entered the land of Canaan with Joshua a land flown with milk and honey. And Jesus is correcting their legalistic idea of the Sabbath.

The Sabbath was made for man not man for the Sabbath. God made it for Adam in the garden so he could rest from his work which was good.

And God renewed it with the Ten Commandments. It's for the good of our bodies and our souls and our minds. And the Sabbath is made for man as a foretaste of the day when we will rest and be banqueting with Jesus forever.

[18 : 39] it's not man for the Sabbath. That day was not to make life a misery for man.

No, it's not to prevent you doing something good. Just an aside, my fridge is a Sabbath keeper just so you know.

It's got a function on it so that you can set it so the light won't come on, the door alarms will not operate, the display will not illuminate and the control panels will not operate if I set a certain code into it.

Yours might as well. It will automatically deactivate after 80 hours as well so I don't have to go and push any work on the Sabbath to reactivate it either.

So the question is, is there an idea of a Sabbath for new covenant people? Oh yes and no. We are creatures who live in the creation and there is need for rest.

[19 : 45] Resting reminds us that we are not God and that God is the one who is the one where to worship, who is the one where to live for, he's the one, God is the one who gets things done.

We're not indispensable. The question is, should it be Saturday or Sunday? Well it doesn't really matter in my mind for we are to worship the Lord God every day, all the time.

So it's not a matter of the day or the week that we worship him but it is imperative I think for us to have a common day of rest on which we can all gather together not because we feel we have to but because we can.

We wouldn't be like this if today was the work day of the week. We get to gather together to hear God's word, to sing his praise, to speak to one another in prayer, to encourage each other to press on in the faith until he comes.

Christians have chosen the first day of the week to do that, Sunday, because it's the day that Jesus rose from the dead. That's why we do it on Sunday not Saturday.

[20 : 59] But you can have the Sabbath any day of the week you like. David, our youth and children's pastor, has Tuesday as his Sabbath. I try and have Saturday as my Sabbath because I break the Sabbath every Sunday by doing what I'm doing.

But one level is the joy and another is the work. But you work it out. But Christians have chosen the first day of the week. Now our society has lost it, right? Our society has lost it and so it makes it extremely hard for people to have a common day of rest together.

Up until about 20 years ago, Woolworths at Kenmore shut on Sundays. You couldn't go to Woolworths at Kenmore on Sunday, it was shut. That's a good thing I think. See our danger is the opposite of what we have here in Mark 2.

Our danger is the danger to forget the Sabbath altogether. Resting, stopping, that's what it means. Our danger is forgetting and forgoing gathering in corporate worship of the Lord on the Lord's Day.

We could be guilty of squeezing in church on a Sunday and then be too busy going about all kind of other things rather than resting and recuperating and refreshing and gathering and sitting around the table and telling the stories of the faith to our families and to each other.

[22 : 29] I think it's a wonderful thing that we've had it, I'm not quite sure where it's up to at the moment, but there was a group of people who would go and have lunch together after church down at the Toowong food court.

That's a wonderful thing to do. I think as a church we could do much, much better at having people round our houses after church for Sunday morning and spending the afternoon with each other.

That would be an appropriate thing to try and reorder the priorities of our lives and what we do. Enough of that. But now we come to the showdown in the synagogue and the question is, how can we destroy Jesus?

And the answer is, we'll try to work that out. So we come to this section and we hear the ultimate in the Pharisee hypocrisy.

As the kingdom of God breaks in again before their eyes, here is the hope of the kingdom of God displayed, restored, healed, healthy people.

[23 : 38] This man with the withered hands there, he's back in the synagogue in Capernaum, the place where he'd driven out the unclean demonic spirit before. The Pharisees are there, there's this man with the withered hand there, and they, the Pharisees, are watching Jesus again.

And notice their motive for watching him. They're going to see if he's going to heal on the Sabbath day. What are you going to do now, Jesus? Not so that they could rejoice in seeing someone healed.

No, not the rejoice, but so they could find some reason to accuse him of breaking the Sabbath. And so Jesus silences the opponents with a question about what's lawful, to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill.

people. And the Pharisees are silent before Jesus. Whatever they say will justify Jesus or reveal their wicked hearts, if they open their mouth one more time.

They are silenced. I was trying to think about it a little bit in terms of when Jesus speaks, the demons were silent. Couldn't speak.

[25 : 07] But picture the scene with me here. The man with the withered hand standing in the middle of the gathering with Jesus. There they are in the middle. And Jesus looking around, looking right around the crowd, okay, and he's displeased, he's angry, you can tell it, right?

At the same time, he's grieved in his heart, we know, by their hard-heartedness. There is no grace in the Pharisee.

Sure, they might have the law down pat, sure, they might know their Bibles really, really, really well and be experts in their knowledge of the Scriptures.

But there is no love, there is no kindness, there's no heart for the lost, there's no rejoicing when sinners are shown mercy. Jesus does good on the Sabbath.

Jesus saves life and livelihood on the Sabbath, restoring the man's hand to functioning rightly. And what do the Pharisees do?

[26 : 20] they don't rejoice in the restoration of this man's withered hand. They join forces with the Herodians. They pounce. Gotcha.

Gotcha in your words, gotcha in your actions, so that they can harm, so they can destroy, and they plot to kill.

Who's breaking the Sabbath? Sabbath. Well, not Jesus. It's actually the Pharisees themselves who are desecrating the Sabbath by their plotting to destroy, to harm Jesus.

And it's interesting now how two opposing forces can be united together to do evil. There'd be no love lost between the Pharisees and the Herodians to date.

the Pharisees didn't like the Roman rules, the Roman rule over them, and the Herodians were not there to be keen on the Jews either. They're an obstinate lot, they're hard to manage, they go about doing their strange stuff.

[27 : 29] The Pharisees, who want to see the Pharisee Judaism increase, are threatened by the teaching of Jesus and his overturning of the legalistic structures and his bringing in of the kingdom of God.

His way, not their way, their way was by, if you could just keep two Sabbaths perfectly, the kingdom of God would come. Jesus must die because he's gracious and kind, doing good, not harm.

And the Herodians, who do not want to upset the peace in Palestine, do not want to have Roman rule threatened by a Jewish upstart, who is gaining a following in a crowd and who is talking about the kingdom of God, Jesus must die because he's claimed to be king.

Well then, what are we to make of this? What kind of things are we to make of this passage? Well, I think one thing. We see that Jesus is strong and he's kind. He's not bound up in legalism, nor is he given over to licentiousness.

He's strong in the face of opposition and questioning. He's kind in calling tax collectors and sinners to himself to follow him, rescuing people from darkness and bringing them into the kingdom.

[28 : 57] He's strong, strong enough to confront the powerful religious leaders of the day. He's righteous in his anger and it's on display towards them.

His righteous anger is against those who make life and the Sabbath a burden, distorting what the Sabbath day was for, those who made fasting a formal duty. He's strong against them and is both strong and kind, able to heal the cripple, doing an amazing thing, restoring someone's health and he's truly God, he is the King, the Lord of the Sabbath.

And one day all of us who've been called out of our sins will sit with him in his kingdom, the kingdom of God, where the new wine flows, rejoicing with countless other sinners that is called to follow him.

And may that be the thing that we keep seeing here week after week and year after year as we live for the glory of God. God, let's pray. Our Father in Heaven, as we see Jesus at work in the world, we see him able to bring about life for those who are cut off from you.

Forgiveness of sin for those who are despised and rejected by society. He's able to confront the religious leaders of the day. He's the one who is Lord of heaven and earth.

[30 : 33] And we long for your kingdom to come, the home of righteousness where we'll gather together for all eternity, banqueting with you and all those you've called to yourself.

We ask in your mercy that we might see your glorious hand at work still today calling people like us out of sin and into your kingdom.

And we do pray for those who may be with us this morning, that they might hear your call to follow Jesus well. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.