

The Divine Disrupter

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- [0 : 00] Keep your Bibles open as we go through the Gospel of Mark. And this week we're now into verse 13 of chapter 2. Well, feel free to disagree with me if you wish, but I think that technology in the form of computers and wireless communications has been the most significant disruptor to our society in our time.
- Agree? Disagree? When I use the word disruptor, though, I don't mean it negatively in the sense of it's a bad thing, but rather that it's something that has significantly disrupted the way we do things in a permanent and no-looking-back way.
- I can think of other disruptors, for example, the mass production of the motor vehicle, the car, or affordable air travel. But these were sort of, I think, very last century, early last century.
- The impact of disruptors is that before they came along, you know, life would occur, we would do things a certain way, and then afterwards, things will be radically changed, such that no one could imagine a time when we didn't do things like this.
- And so most of us just can't conceive of life today without technology. In fact, most of you probably can't leave home without a smartphone. Let me consider one thing, though, how technology has changed just one aspect of our lives.
- [1 : 42] That's something as mundane as storage. Before the computer arrived, we stored everything physically, didn't we?
- Letters, records, I mean those records, turntable, photos, money. But nowadays, we store everything, well, most things digitally.
- JPEGs and PDFs, not photo prints. Whereas we had cassettes and videos, floppy disks, remember those?
- Now we subscribe to a library, whether it's Disney Plus or Spotify. Now, some things have never changed or don't change, of course. So, for example, storage space is still an issue, isn't it?
- It used to be that no sooner that you bought a bookshelf and filled it, that you realized you need to buy more. Well, there's no difference now, isn't it? It's just that now we need to buy more gigabytes and terabytes.
- [2 : 50] My Google Drive always tells me I'm 85% full. And I refuse to spend more money to pay that \$15 a month to get that whatever terabyte that they're selling me.
- Theft is another thing. Whereas you used to have to lock your house to prevent people getting into your storage. Nowadays, you need password protection just so that they can't get into your service provider's server.
- And so today we find another disruptor in the Bible. And he's none other than Jesus. And he's what I would call the divine disruptor.
- You see, the religious leaders in his day taught the people to practice their faith, which was Judaism, in a certain way. There were assumptions and expectations, explicit or implicit, that underpin everything they did.

And they learned to read the scriptures, which was the Old Testament, and understand it a certain way. And because religion was such an integral part of their life, it flowed into everything else they did.

[3 : 58] And what Jesus did when he came was to disrupt all that, to upturn their assumptions about what was good and how to find their way back to God.

It's really no different today. We might not call it religion, but every society has a worldview. In it are assumptions about the meaning of life and what is a good life and what is expected of you in order to have that good life.

Well, when Jesus came and disrupted their worldview, it threatened some of them, the Jews and the religious leaders in particular, because everything that they had invested in, spent so much time to build up, was being dismantled by Jesus.

And so they responded with opposition, rather than actually consider whether, you know, what Jesus was saying could actually be true. So let's begin then with the first section, where Jesus disrupts their worldview by being a friend of sinners, verse 13.

Once again, Jesus went outside, out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him and he began to teach them. As he walked along, he saw Levi, son of Alpha, sitting at the tax collector's booth. Follow me, Jesus told them.

[5 : 11] And Levi got up and followed him. While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him.

And when the teachers of the law, who were Pharisees, saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples, why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners? Now, given that Jesus had been teaching about repentance and the forgiveness of sin, you know, what he did was, really shouldn't have been a surprise to them.

But of course, it's one thing to hear what Jesus is teaching, and another to actually see it happen in real life. It's like when you're down on the beach and you see that sign telling you that there are dangerous rips and there's a danger of being drowned.

You know, you go, oh yeah, I get that. You know, hypothetically, you see the danger. But it's only when you see someone literally dragged out to sea by the rip, perhaps even lose their life, that wow, it really hits home.

This is for real. So likewise, the people, including the Pharisees, certainly understood sin as a concept. After all, they've been bringing sacrifices regularly to the temple to atone for their sins.

[6 : 23] But that forgiveness was for them, the good people, those who did the right thing, those who tried to live an upright life. For Jesus now to suggest that forgiveness is also available for the bad people, like sinners and tax collectors, well, that's taking things too far, isn't it?

Now, we're not sure who the other sinners were, perhaps prostitutes and social outcasts, but the tax collectors were a particularly hated group of people because they got rich through exploitation.

They used the authority, the name of the Roman oppressors to overtax people. They were like stand-over mafia. Imagine if today Jesus ate with the loan sharks.

That's what that's like. You see, people thought that when the Messiah, their Messiah would come, he would set them free from their oppressors. They didn't think that he would then befriend them.

And in their minds, you know, the world was divided into good people and bad people. The Romans and tax collectors, well, they were bad people. And God's Messiah was meant to save the good people from the bad people.

[7 : 40] And that's how it should be, isn't it? Bad people don't deserve to be saved, do they? But those who try to do good, well, they deserve it. The other priests, the Levites, the Pharisees, those who tried to obey the law.

And so, if it wasn't bad enough that Jesus had bypassed them, and then last week, if you remember, chose some ordinary fisherman in Peter and John, this week he even chooses a tax collector, Levi, for a disciple over them.

Outrageous. But that's to misunderstand, isn't it? The mission of God's Messiah. You see, when you think that a Messiah comes for the good people, what you really have is a political or social justice Messiah who frees righteous victims from the bad people, the oppressive regime or unjust system.

But in verse 17, Jesus responds by saying, he hasn't come for the righteous, but for sinners. And so we read, on hearing this, Jesus said to them, it is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.

I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners. I mean, you know this. If you're well, you're not going to see a doctor, are you? You have to pay the excess on top of the Medicare rebate.

[9 : 05] But a waste of time. Now, the same way, Jesus, when he comes for the sinners, the righteous would not come to him, would they?

The righteous, or those who think they are, don't see a need for him, because they don't realize the depth of their sin. And you know, the greatest sin that stops them from seeing this is actually their pride.

For pride is the thing that makes you think you're good enough, that your deeds or your character are acceptable to God. Now, you don't think you have to be absolutely perfect. You just need to think you're good enough.

That's pride. Good enough to be accepted by God. Which also leads you to look down on others who don't meet your own criteria. And then, just as the Pharisees did, take offense when Jesus chooses to eat with them instead of you.

Now, of course, it's not that Jesus didn't wish to eat with the Pharisees. Because if you read Luke chapter 14, there was an occasion where Jesus did eat with a Pharisee at his home.

[10 : 15] So, Jesus is not picking one class of people over another. Rather, it was the Pharisees and the teachers themselves who didn't want to eat with Jesus. Because why?

For them to eat with Jesus meant they had to also eat with the sinners and tax collectors. And so, they've self-selected themselves out of a relationship with Jesus because they can't bear to be associated with sinners.

They couldn't see that their pride was just as devastating as the sin that they saw in these other people. And pride is a rather unique sin, isn't it?

Because with every other sin, you know when you're stuffed up, right? When you lie, you feel guilty. Your conscience pricks you. You know you've sinned.

But pride has a way of masquerading as virtue. When you're proud, you actually feel good. You think you're better than others.

[11 : 17] You don't realize that you need to repent when in reality, you do. Everyone else can see the pride in you, but yourself, isn't it? So, let's face the facts, I think, that pride is just something all of us fall into so easily, me included.

We love comparing ourselves, don't we? And we take solace in the fact that we're not the worst. You know, we don't have to be the best as long as we're not the worst.

And we look at those who are worse and we go, well, at least I'm better than them. And mind you, it's not just the rich and the powerful that are proud.

Because even if you don't have wealth and power, you can be proud too. Because, you know, they tend to look at the rich and the powerful and then sneer at them, don't it, right?

I don't know whether you do that, but, you know, you go, well, at least I'm not as proud as they are. But that's pride, isn't it? And that's why when Jesus came, his call for repentance is actually universal.

[12 : 26] He didn't say, you rich people have to repent. No, he said all of us have to repent because pride is everyone's sin. No one's better than the other. Yet we think they are.

We are. And the only thing is, do we realize our own pride? And so that's the first disruption that Jesus brings to society to challenge the way we look at ourselves, to challenge how we divide people into good and bad.

And of course, we are the good people. There are others are the bad. And therefore, Jesus must favor us, the good people. Well, let's turn now to the second incident where Jesus reveals a second way in which he's the divine disruptor.

And this time, the issue is not eating with sinners. It's not eating at all. That is fasting. So verse 18, we read, 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?

Let me first explain a bit about fasting because I think it helps us then to understand what's going on here. You see, fasting was a practice that developed in Israel over time to express mourning and sorrow for sin.

[13 : 38] But if you look at the Old Testament, there's actually no specific command to fast. But what happened was that over time, the prophets would call people to fasting to express regret over the way things are, usually because of their own sin, the people's sin.

By contrast, if you look at the Old Testament, there are commands to celebrate, commands to celebrate festivals, which were occasions of feasting. And that's because they were expressions of God's faithfulness and God's blessing on them for which they were to be thankful.

It also signified that those feasts, that God's presence was with them. And hence, we had that reading in Isaiah 25, where on the day of the Lord, where they were feasting in God's presence, that was a joyous celebration, that God was with them.

And they ate in God's presence. There are echoes there of Mount Sinai in Exodus, where God did summon first, when he first took them out of Egypt, he summoned the elders up to Mount Sinai to feast with them.

And they were in God's presence and did not die. But when Israel continually disobeyed the Lord, even when they were in this land of blessing and promise, God sent them into exile.

[14 : 53] And then the prophets urged them for a time of fasting, to hasten as they fasted. And it was a way of hastening, bringing forward the Lord's return and restoring Israel as a kingdom.

And so this practice of fasting was kept up, even after they returned from exile, because they came back and they still saw that Israel had not returned to its former glory.

And it became almost a national observance, a show of patriotism almost, that if you didn't fast, people might begin to wonder whether you were on board with the return of the Messiah or not, or the coming of the Messiah.

It's a bit like politicians today, you know, they're cheering on the national team. I think the Matildas recently won something, is that right? And you're all the Soccerroos. Now I'm pretty sure not all politicians follow soccer, right?

They're into NRL or AFL or whatever. But if they didn't post something on TikTok or Insta, you know, people will start questioning their loyalty to Australia, wouldn't they?

[15 : 59] Well, the same applied to fasting, which is why when Jesus' disciples didn't fast, questions were being asked. Are they being loyal? Why do the disciples of John and the Pharisees fast, but Jesus' disciples didn't?

What's implied in this is that they're wondering whether Jesus believed in God's Messiah and God's kingdom. Why are they not expressing a longing for this? Of course, the irony is that Jesus is the Messiah and in him the kingdom has come.

And so Jesus answers them in verse 19 to say, how can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? No, 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.

And so if they pay careful attention to what Jesus was saying here, they would know that what he's saying is he is the Messiah and that in him the kingdom has come. And if Jesus has indeed come as the Messiah, then something decisive has now happened in Israel's history.

That's why there's a major disruption going on. The king has returned. Fasting is no longer appropriate. What they have been fasting for has now occurred.

[17 : 15] Wake up. The time now is to feast, not fast. It's a bit like the wedding reception that I and some of us went to last week. You know, before the bridegroom came into the room, we were all seated and the bride with him, we couldn't start our entrees or main course, right?

I was a bit hungry, but you know, we waited. But you know, once they did, and while they came in with a real bang, there were a lot of fireworks and stuff, the pressure was on, wasn't it, for the kitchen to start bringing out the food.

You know, the party was on in earnest. I wanted my entree. You know, I was at the table further down the back, so it took a while. But anyway, we all wanted the food because the party is on.

And you know, when the bridegroom is there, it would be rude to fast, wouldn't it? No, we had to enjoy our food. It was obligatory, almost. And so for you to fast when the Messiah has come, it's almost to say that, you know, I deny his identity.

I don't accept that he's the Messiah. But of course, you know, if you expect the Messiah to be someone to come and free you from oppression and suffering, which Jesus did not do at the time, then you miss the fact that he is the Messiah, isn't it?

[18 : 35] You wouldn't celebrate all the other things, all the other blessings that he brings. Forgiveness of sins, reconciliation with the Father in Heaven, the coming of the Holy Spirit, all these blessings you wouldn't see because you're focused on the fact that you want him to come and liberate you.

Now notice too that Jesus goes on to say that there is a time, there will be a time when there will be a period of fasting. And here he's referring to his death on the cross, which will occur and when he will then be taken away.

And at that time, they will fast, probably figuratively at least, because what they're doing is lamenting the great cost of the kingdom's coming and the blessings that flow.

And in that sense, the coming of the Messiah is actually different to that of the groom, isn't it? Because when you come to the marriage of the groom and the bride, it's pretty much when they leave, it's happily ever after, isn't it?

You know, they ride off into the sunset in their, I don't know, bridal car with those cans trailing at the back and they begin their life happily ever after.

[19 : 43] But for Jesus, for the marriage of Christ and his church to be consummated, Jesus actually had to sacrifice his life. And that's why if you read in the book of Revelation, it's called the marriage feast of the lamb.

Jesus, the groom, is the sacrificial lamb. He had to lay down his life in order for this marriage to be possible. And that's why when he comes, he's a friend of sinners.

Because we can only belong to the church, his bride, as forgiven sinners, not as righteous people. Those who look to him as the lamb who takes away the sin of the world, we belong to the church.

We belong to the bride. Now some people have said that this reference to fasting may also apply to a time after Jesus' ascension, that is now, when Jesus is not physically with us.

You make up your own mind, but I'm not entirely convinced by this because in the overall scheme of history, given what Jesus has already done on the cross, I think we are now in a celebration phase of history.

[20 : 54] That is, the marriage feast has arrived because of what Jesus has done. He's conquered sin and death on the cross and then he was resurrected to life. We have begun this eternal and uninterrupted celebration because of Jesus.

Now I know that the fact that Jesus is not with us now physically, although the spirit is with us, that yes, that means we are waiting again for his coming and there is still sin and suffering and death in this world.

So in that sense, there may be a sense in which it's appropriate to fast figuratively. I don't think though it's a command to fast literally, but if it helps us wait on God, then okay, but it's not a command I don't think from this passage.

Instead, because of what Jesus has done, the command is rather to repent and come to faith in Christ, give thanks, celebrate that our sins are forgiven, rejoice, rejoice with others when they do the same, not thinking we're better than them, but welcoming them to join us and then living life joyfully with trust and obedience in God.

You know, sometimes if you've been a Christian for a while, you've grown up in a Christian home, we take for granted just what a divine disruption Jesus has brought to our lives. You know, even if you've been a Christian, you forget what life was like without Jesus.

[22 : 27] And for Israel, life had become a burden before Jesus. Over time, even though God's law required them to love him and love their neighbor at heart, essentially that was what, they started building up rules upon rules upon rules as to you need to do this if you want to be accepted by God.

And, you know, it became to such an extent that it was a burden for them to live under it. And the fear, too, as though if they slipped up, you know, God's judgment would come down on them and they would lose their standing before God.

And the teachers and the Pharisees, they were totally invested in this system. They spent hours working on the law, trying to meet it. And, you know, I think they almost felt we're that close to getting there.

So that when Jesus comes and then he says, none of them comes for anything, all that hard work you put in. Now, what you need is to repent. You can understand why they weren't happy, right?

On the other hand, these tax collectors and sinners, they welcomed Jesus because they knew. They were so far short. They knew that they had no hope apart from Jesus. Now, many of you, I know, have done major exams before, like VC, or maybe you're doing them right now.

And I know for a lot of you, that year is a great burden and stress, isn't it? But, some of you also know that there are unis around, ANU is one of them, I think, that offer guaranteed places before you even take your exams.

And that's what Jesus' coming does to our life. God's judgment is no longer hanging over our heads, is it? We're assured of forgiveness, eternal life, hope in heaven, is not dependent on what score we get anymore or how good we are.

[25 : 06] I know that may sound strange, but they do. You know, they enjoy the learning for learning itself, isn't it? I mean, you guys do that, right? No? And as a result, without that stress, they actually perform better, don't they?

That's the kind of disruption that Jesus brings to our lives, isn't it? Not just for the people of Israel, but for all of us. When we put our faith in Him, we have that assurance of forgiveness.

[26 : 14] And so if you're here today and you've not experienced that, then please come, join us. We're part of the feast now, not the fasting. And if you've forgotten what it's like, even though you're a Christian, then let me urge you to just remember what Jesus has done for us.

Give us joy to live for You and fill our hearts with thanksgiving and praise all the days of our lives until Jesus returns. In His name we pray.

Amen.