

## Mark Week 7

# What's God ACTUALLY Doing?

April 26, 2026



Let me ask you a question—and I think it's a question all of us will be able to answer. Have you ever just missed something? Just missed it. I mean, I don't know—maybe it was a birthday party that you were supposed to be at, and for whatever reason you didn't mean to—you weren't trying to be malicious, or you were trying to sin or something—you just missed it, you know? Maybe you booked a hotel room one time, and you got there, and you realized that you booked it for the wrong time. I don't know if you've ever done that before. I've done that one before. It's no fun—showing up: “No, I know I have a reservation.”

“No, you don't, Mr. Bennett.”

You know, “I'm pretty sure I do.”

“Well, yeah, you did—for last month.”

Like, “Oh, okay. Should have been there then,” you know?

Maybe you purchased a car one time—you walked around it on the showroom floor, and you brought it home, and like a couple days later you realize it had a big scratch on it and you're like, “Man, I missed that.” It's going to be a hard one to go back two days later and go, “I think that was here before I...” you know? I mean, you know, I think we've all had that. Maybe a lunch that you were supposed to be at and you missed it. You just missed it. You didn't mean to miss it. You weren't trying to do something wrong. You just missed it.

And it probably could go even deeper and even more profound on things like—we don't want to talk about anniversaries or, you know, things like that. But the reality is we've all had those experiences, and I want you to just take that thought of, you know, “I've missed some things along life—didn't mean to, just genuinely missed it.” Hold that for a second, because we will come back to that before we are done.

As you know, we're in the Gospel of Mark, and if you are joining us after Easter, you haven't been here—maybe you didn't know that. But we are in the Gospel of Mark. And before I pick back up there, I want to take a second and I really want you to hear me here. I want you to really lean in. If Grace is your church—online, here—I want you to hear this. You all got the absolute privilege the last couple of weeks to see someone who is so dear to my heart, like a son, started here when he was a teenager—to watch him grow and to see him do the things that he's doing. I just hope that you realize that what God is doing in the life of Chris Pedro and his family is just absolutely unbelievable. And, you

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know, he's really genuinely like a son to me. And to watch him do what he's doing and to do what he did is just incredible.

In fact, my daughter Parker—she'll kill me. Whenever you're a pastor, if you become a pastor, don't talk about your family publicly. They don't like it—but she's not here. Maybe she'll—don't tell her that I talked about her. But she had some friends over today, and one of the girls that was over, she goes, “Pastor Chip, we go to your church.” And I was like, “Oh man.” She's over here at my house—she's going to go back and tell her parents they're not even Christians at the Bennett household, you know? “I thought this guy was holy.” He is—H O L E Y, you know? And she said, “I love you, Pastor Chip.” And I'm like that—you know, I'm in a pair of shorts and the dogs are barking—you're just a human being, you know? And I said to her, “Well, that's great.” I said, “Did you get to hear Chris Pedro?” She goes, “Oh yes, I did.” She said, “And I want you to know that I just absolutely broke down in tears when he shared his testimony.” And it was just—it was really great.

So when you see Chris, when you see Maddie, when you see the kids, tell them you love them. Pray for them. God is doing some great things in Chris Pedro. And I'll tell you this, as a pastor, he is a prized moment for me in the 16 years that I've been here. I mean that. Love that guy. And you can tell him you love him. He's a humble guy. It won't go to his head. You can tell—he's just a good dude.

Anyway, so we're in the Gospel of Mark, and I want to bring us back. It's been a couple of weeks. We were in a section that I told you were conflict stories, and there were five of them. It started in chapter 2, verse 1, and it went through chapter 3, verse 6. And if you remember, I showed you them and we had been working through them—the paralytic, and then we were at Levi's house the last time we were together in the Gospel of Mark, where he was eating with the tax collectors and the sinners. And I explained that Mark—and all the gospel writers do this—they take material and then they shape it in the way that they want to shape it to make a point, because these are theological documents. They're not as concerned about chronology, they're not as concerned about biography—they're concerned about how they're structuring this for you and me to understand what it is that they're trying to tell us.

And in the enterprise of Mark's gospel, one of the large themes is that people just don't understand who Jesus is. They're missing him. The demons are recognizing who he is, but a lot of people don't. And so these conflict stories here, the way Mark has put them together, is going to end in chapter 3:6 where the religious people want to kill Jesus. And if we're reading this and being honest, we should go, “Wow, that's striking—that people who went to synagogue

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regularly, who read scripture regularly, who recited prayers regularly, who would have said they were complete, devoted followers of Yahweh—when the very God that this book talks about walked in front of them, they wanted to kill him.” That should be like, wow—if we’re reading this right—like whoa, what—and could I be missing something?

So we’re going through this, and now we’re at this third sort of conflict story, which is a fasting debate. And it’s really weighty and dense, and I decided a long time ago that I’m not going to just try to rush through this. There’s no expiration date on the Gospel of Mark. I’m more concerned about reading it correctly so that we can understand it—but not just to understand it so we have information. I’m hoping that we will read it and get the information so that we can be transformed, because that’s what God wants to do in our lives. He wants to transform you and me. He doesn’t want us to be bloated with a lot of knowledge and Bible bullets. He wants us to live the way he wants us to live. He wants us to be transformed.

So we’re going to take some time, because this is a really dense and really powerful couple of scriptures here. So in this fasting debate, where some people come to Jesus and ask what’s going on with this idea of fasting, they come as many people will—and you probably know this—but many people ask questions not because they really want to learn something. They just want to know where you fit in the scheme of things to see if you’re on their team or you’re not on their team. You know, I get it all the time as a pastor. “Pastor Chip, what do you believe about this?” And at my age now, I just look at them and I say—sincerely, not trying to be snarky—“Are you asking me that so you can size me up to see if I’m in agreement with you, or are you asking because you really want to learn and understand why I believe what I believe?”

And a lot of times, as you know, people ask the question because they want to know exactly what these people want to know of Jesus—they want to know who’s in. That’s what we want to know. We want to know who’s in. “Are you in? Because it doesn’t look like you’re doing it the way we do it.”

So, we’re trying to ask these questions of you, Jesus, to see whether you’re in or if you’re out, which is what a lot of us do in our Christianity—not really asking people because we want to know what they believe, but asking to size them up real quickly so we can know, “I’m not going to dinner with them,” you know? That they don’t fit my thing or whatever. And so we’re going to see this in this passage, and it’s just something that we should pay attention to, because what we want to do is we want to read Scripture and we want it to be a mirror and to say, “Hey, maybe these are some things that I could work on. Maybe these are some things I could look at in my own life.” So let’s get into the text here and see if we can learn something together.

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We're told, "Now"—and this "now" is not a chronological now. It could be that right after Levi's house this is what happened, but it doesn't have to be. And one of the things when you're reading the Gospels is understanding that Mark has chosen these five stories. He could have chosen other stories. These are the five that he put together. And he put them together to make a point. He didn't put them together to make a chronology. He didn't put them together to harmonize with something else. He selected—what we call redaction in scholarship—he redacted this. He put it together in the way that was most powerful for you and me when we read it, to be confronted with the truths of Jesus and the gospel.

So "now" just means it's another story—he's moving on to something else. It very well could have been chronological, but it doesn't have to be. And if you try to make everything chronological, try to make everything a certain way, you end up having all kinds of issues. Then you have people tell you, "Oh, the Bible disagrees and doesn't make sense," but they're trying to make the Bible do things that the Bible's not really trying to do. So don't let people get you all messed up with that stuff.

So it says, "Now John's disciples and the Pharisees..." Now these two groups were not similar. They were very different in their understanding of life and practice. The Pharisees lived in the city; John's people were more outside—they were more apocalyptic. But they had an agreement. There was one place where these two groups intersected, which is what Mark is doing here. John's disciples and the Pharisees—although they had a lot of differences in the way they pursued God—there was one thing that they did that was similar.

It says John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. This idea of fasting probably deserves a series—I'm not going to be able to get into all of this—but what would happen is, in the Old Testament, a lot of times when people would fast—you can read it in Esther, in Isaiah, with David—something would happen where there was grief or a problem, an overwhelming moment of lament. They would sit in sackcloth and ashes and fast and grieve. In Isaiah 58, they were told not to make it just about themselves, but to help others—to loose the bonds of wickedness and give bread to the hungry.

But by the time of Jesus, fasting had become a sort of religious signal. They fasted on Mondays and Thursdays, and the religious people—you would know they were fasting—and everybody would go, "Oh, that's the people that are serious. That's the in-crowd, because they're fasting on Mondays and Thursdays." So we're going to run into an issue here, because John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting, and that was known.

So these people come and ask Jesus a question. They say, "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but

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your disciples do not fast?" They're trying to figure out who's in, because it doesn't look like what's going on fits their system. We'll see why they're asking this question—not just because they want to know, but because they're trying to size Jesus up.

Jesus' response is really deep and interesting. He says, "Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them?" He's pointing to the idea of the messianic banquet—the Messiah is present. He's like, "At a wedding, where it's joyous and uplifting, are you going to show up all droopy? 'I'm starving. Look at me.'" No—it's a wedding. Don't bring your fast into the wedding. As long as the bridegroom is with them, they cannot fast. It's not time. This is not the time for fasting. This is a time to celebrate and rejoice because the kingdom of God is here in your midst.

But then he says something else that's really important. He says, "The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them." This word "taken" is a violent seizure. People ask, "Did Jesus know?" He knew. He knew. We wouldn't sing, "Jesus, did you know?"—he knew. And we see that here. He's fully aware that he's going to be taken. This is early in Mark, and he knows what's coming. He says, "There will be a day when the bridegroom is taken away, and then they will fast in that day." He's picking up on the parallel of presence and absence. When the presence is here, it's joy. When the absence is here, it's lament—it's time to fast.

Now he doesn't stop there, because he knows they're asking the question to size him up. So he gives them two quick illustrations. He says, "No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment." You don't take an old garment that's already shrunk and attach a new piece of fabric to it. If you do, the patch will shrink and pull away from the old, and a worse tear is made. You can't just patch what I'm doing onto your old system. That's not how this works.

Then he says, "No one puts new wine into old wineskins." You don't take new wine and put it into old wineskins.

Because if you do, the wine will burst the skins. It doesn't work. It's like the garment—it doesn't work. It'll tear away. You can't put the new on the old. You can't put the new wine into the old wineskins because the wine will be destroyed, and so are the skins. But new wine is for fresh wineskins.

So what is going on here? What can we learn? This is a weighty, weighty passage of Scripture. I've got three things that I want to talk about. I could probably talk about 30 things out of here, but these are the three things that I think are in here that we need to wrestle with as the people of God and then allow God to transform us.

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The first thing that I pick up on is this idea of new and old—and you see the fasting where they can fast here, they can't fast here. There's presence and absence. There's a real interesting sort of flavor there of presence and absence. And a question I would ask all of us, myself included, is: is our Christian life—when we look at our life and the way we practice Christianity—is it one of absence more than it is of presence?

And you may say, “Chip, what exactly do you mean by that?” Let me clarify this a little bit more. Let me ask you a question. Are we known for our joy and hope, or are we known for our uneasiness, pessimism, and fear? Are we known as people of presence, or are we known as people of absence?

And let's be honest—we experience both as Christians. We experience the very presence of God because he said, “The Spirit of God is within you and me.” He said, “I will never leave you or forsake you.” So we have the very presence of God. When we meet, the presence of God is here, whether we acknowledge it or not. But there's also the reality that he's not walking with us exactly the way he walked with the disciples, and we long for that day. So there's a sense of absence.

So there's a tension in Christianity of presence and absence. And here's the question: which one do we reflect more? Is it joy and hope, or is it uneasiness and pessimism and fear and anxiety—looking around like everything's falling apart? Because Jesus said, if I'm here, you can't fast. Where there's presence, there's joy. There's excitement. There's glory. There are all of these things.

And I would ask, just humbly between all of us—is there a time where we, as Christians, go away, like Jesus said, and we don't make a scene of it, but we get in our own closets, we get away, and we have those moments of lament and grief? Absolutely. When people are taken out of our lives or when things are happening in the world, there's a place for that.

But when we interface with people—at work, with our families—are we people that look more like absence or more like presence? Because in the New Testament, when we interface with people, we're supposed to be lights. We're supposed to have peace and joy. In fact, we're supposed to have so much joy and peace that when we're going through difficulty, people want to know what's different about us.

We're also to be people who carry his presence, which means when he is here, it is a festival time. It's a joyous time. It's a time of peace. It's a time of glory. And so the question I would ask is: since Jesus teaches that fasting belongs to absence—not presence—and he's using the aspect of grief, do people hear us say Jesus lives with us, but our actual lives look as if he doesn't?

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Let me put it this way: if people watched us closely, would they conclude by the way we live that they're at a funeral—or that they're at a wedding?

Now don't hear what I'm not saying. There is a total place for lament and grief in the Christian life. We can come in here as the people of God and say, "God, we don't understand. How long, O Lord?" There's nothing wrong with that. But when we interface with the world, we are people who carry the very presence of God because the Holy Spirit lives within us. We ought to be people filled with joy and peace.

Man, what a world changer the church would be if we were people that carried his presence wherever we went.

Second thing—and lean in because I want to make sure you hear this. I'm not here to entertain anybody. I'm not here to make you love me. I'm here as your pastor. I care about your soul, and I care about the witness of the local church in the community. So what I say comes from a place of believing God wants more for you and me, not less.

So the second thing is this: **In what ways might we be trying to attach Jesus to our ways of life rather than allowing his transforming power to change ours?**

Think about that. In what ways might we be trying to attach Jesus to our life? Jesus says you can't take a patch and put it on old stuff. You can't take new wine and put it into old wineskins. That's not how this works.

You're asking me about fasting, but really you're asking how you can fit me into your system. And Jesus is saying, that's not the way the kingdom works.

And I want to be heard here—not being snarky—this is just from my heart. If you spend any time in American Christian culture—TV, books—you can't escape this. It's almost like the American gospel. It's pervasive. It's everywhere. And it sounds something like this: how can we fit Jesus into what we already believe, value, and practice?

You hear it all the time: "Here are three steps to a happy life." "Here's how Jesus can help you achieve what you already want." It's like Jesus becomes a self-help coach—"you do you, just add a little Jesus on top."

Stay in American Christianity long enough and you'll hear that. It's like, just continue living however you want—just add faith on top of it and everything will be fine. Say a prayer, and then go live however you want.

Let me say this clearly, as a pastor who cares: Christianity is not about making us spiritually comfortable. Following Jesus will lead to a structural disruption of our lives.

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But listen to me—that disruption will give you more life than you could have ever gotten if you had everything this world could offer you.

Let me put it two other ways. He doesn't get us, he transforms us. Let me put it another way. He didn't come to make broken people a little better. He came to make dead people live.

And it's not about, you know, just go do you—here's a little bit of Jesus and then you go do you. The whole world is confused. They don't even know who it is that they're supposed to be, because identity is shattered in our world. The gospel is never “go do you.” The gospel is come lay your life at the foot of the cross to the man who died on the cross for your sins, who rose on the third day. Take up your cross and follow him, and the life that you were looking for in this world—you will get more life from him than you could ever get if you had everything this world afforded you.

And lastly—well, I'll end with my little thing there. Just enough.

Here are some questions that maybe we don't want to ask, but I'm just going to say—be honest. Take a moment here and say, “God, search me, know me, examine me,” and ask these questions:

What in our lives would be the most threatened if we took Jesus completely seriously?

Can I tell you something? Whatever it is that's threatened, when he crushes it and rebuilds, it will be way better than what it was before.

How about this one: What are we trying to patch instead of allowing full renovation?

How about this question: What old wineskin are we secretly hoping Jesus will leave intact? “Don't touch that one. Don't get ahold of that one. I like that one. Hey Jesus, look over here.”

Or how about this: Do we want transformation or just reassurance?

Because Jesus comes to change lives. When you read Scripture, it's not that the disciples were the same guys they were before—they were changed. Paul was changed. Mary was changed. People were changed. What he wants to do is change us. In what ways might we be trying to take a little bit of Jesus and put it over here? Because when I look around at American Christians, I see a lot of selling out for a lot of things. Things that are super biblical and clear—we go, “Well, yeah, I know.” No, there's no “well, yeah, I know.” If it's biblical, it's biblical. Don't shut down to the truth of God's word. Be honest with the truth of God's word. And if it's wrong, it's wrong every time, all the time, in every way. It's just wrong.

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And it doesn't mean that we're doing that to be intolerant or nasty. I believe that when we do what God says—even though sometimes it's hard work—the results are so much better for you and me.

So, third point, third thing: **Could we be disciplined in our devotion but missing God?**

Boy, that's a tough one, isn't it? This is why, you know, when I put these together, it's a challenge. I don't put messages together just to preach a message. I don't put these together without first going, "Oh man..." These are tough. But that's a tough question, because people miss Jesus.

Yeah, but that's those people over there. No, no, no—the Bible wasn't written for those people over there. It's written for you and me. It's written as a mirror for you and me.

So John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. It wasn't time to be fasting. They missed it. Jesus said they missed it. It's like, wow—they missed it. They were sincere. They were consistent. They were biblically grounded, but misaligned with what God was doing right then.

When I read that, I'm like, "Ouch, man." God, I don't want to be missing it. I mean, just asking—are we even open to the idea that what we may think is godly is actually missing what God is doing right in front of us?

Or this is true: we can be truly disciplined but completely out of sync with what God is doing right now. Or maybe another way to say it: it's possible to be spiritually serious and still be resisting God—not by rebellion, but by misreading the moment.

You ever missed it? Ever missed it?

You look around here—we had someone this past week who looks at churches and understands churches, and the exact words were, "I have no idea how you all do what you do with the amount of square footage that you have in this church." And I'm like, "We don't either." We had people standing in line for Easter. People don't stand in line for church. How in the world did we get over 14,000 people through here? I have no idea.

But I look around and I go, God's saving souls. He's putting marriages back together. He's doing all kinds of miraculous things. A casual observer should be able to say, "Man, God is working around here."

But listen to me—hear my heart. It's so easy to go, "Well then, if God's moving, just get in, serve, be a part." But what will happen is somebody will come along and say, "But pastor, what we really need to be doing..." No, no, no—what we're doing is really good. People's lives are changing. We don't need to shift to

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something else. We need to stay right here—preaching the Bible, being intentional neighbors, doing good works, and not being weird. That's what God's doing right now. Don't miss God around here. He's at work. Get in.

Let me be bold here. Look around. You want to know what God is doing in our world? He is dismantling the idols that his children have lifted up as answers to the world's problems that cannot solve the world's problems. Churches are being crumbled. Things are coming down because God says, "I am God, and there will be no other before me."

We've spent the last 40-plus years trying to make the world moral. You can't make dead people moral. You have to preach the gospel. You have to tell them about Jesus. You have to seek and save the lost. That's what you have to do.

God's tearing it all down right in front of us, saying, "Do what I told you to do. Be the people I called you to be. Work in quietness. Don't grumble. Don't complain. Live in joy. Be the light to the world."

You can't patch these things onto old systems. Let God transform your life. And when people see that, they'll want what you have.

And I'm going to tell you right now—I will stand before God and say, "What I did was preach Jesus. I preached out of the Bible. I told people to save the lost, to love people, to do good works, and not be weird." And if he says, "You blew it," then I blew it. But I'm not going to stand before God and say I avoided preaching Jesus or avoided Scripture.

Folks, we've got to keep God at the center of everything we are doing. We cannot let this world divide us. We've got to stay focused.

So we're going to sing a final song. Don't leave. Don't tune out. I know it went a little long—that's okay. Stay in here. You're safe. But I'm praying that in this moment, God would do something powerful in our lives.

We are at a moment right now where God is doing something incredible, and I want to seize that with everything in me. Because if we can just get one more person into the kingdom of God—it's worth it. One person—it's worth it.

Father, I humbly pray that you take my meager words, faulty words. Hear the heart of the pastor of this church that you put here when I didn't even want to be here. God, I want our church to be a place where you are at the center of everything. I don't want to get distracted. I don't want to patch old things. I don't want to pour new wine into old wineskins. I want to be a church of your presence.

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Help us to be the people you've called us to be. As we sing this final song, I pray your Spirit would sweep through this building and through those watching online—for your glory alone. We love you, we thank you, and we praise you, Lord, in Jesus' name. And everybody said, "Amen."

