

Mark 2:18 The disciples of John and of the Pharisees were fasting. Then they came and said to Him, "Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?" 19 And Jesus said to them, "Can the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast. 20 But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days. 21 No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; or else the new piece pulls away from the old, and the tear is made worse. 22 And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine bursts the wineskins, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins." (NKJV)

The more I thought about this situation in our text, the more interesting it became. Jesus had just done two things that would be, to all onlookers, completely inappropriate. Think about this. Jesus had called out a tax collector to be on his team. And then he had partied with the tax collector and his unsavory friends. Anyone giving Jesus any kind of human advice would have advised against this. What would people think? And I don't even mean, what would the hypocritical religious leaders think? I mean, what would those sincere lovers of God who are trying to sort this out... what would they think?

Wasn't this going to make it harder for them to follow Christ? How can Christ be legitimate if He goes against what would commonly be understood by the populace? You can imagine what the conversations about Christ would have been like around the supper table. Not only did Christ choose a Jewish traitor to be on His team. He enjoyed the company of a multitude of Jewish traitors and law breakers. He is eating and drinking with them. He doesn't seem to regard that kind of exposure as being at all defiling. It would appear to everyone looking on that Jesus must have a different idea of holiness than they do. And humans, being what we are, everyone's first assumption would be that if their seemers were saying that Christ is wrong, then Christ must be wrong.

And suppose you were trained by John the Baptist. There wouldn't be much partying at that school. Uncomfortable clothes worn in an uncomfortable environment with food that was obtained in uncomfortable ways. Since John's primary focus was repentance, much about him would have focused on the need to display outwardly what one was experiencing inwardly. I am not aware of anywhere in scripture where repentance is directly associated with rejoicing. It is more an expression of mourning. Rejoicing follows repentance but I am not sure it accompanies it.

Along with this, John the Baptist was in prison awaiting an uncertain fate. The fast on John's disciples part, could have been in keeping with their prayers for the

release of their teacher. Christ, not fasting for John's release, could be seen as a slam on Christ's regard and concern for John.

So we have John the Baptist's disciples evaluating Christ according to what they have been taught. And Christ isn't looking so good. While John the Baptist's disciples are depriving themselves of pleasures that were allowed, it looks like Christ and His disciples are partaking of pleasures that were not allowed in the minds of most Jews. They would wonder, in light of their world view and their teacher's focus, why would Christ be doing this?

And then we have the Pharisees.

The law only required a fast on one day of the year- the day of atonement. Lev 16:29,31 23:27-32; Numbers 29:7

After the exile there is record of annual fasts Zech 7:5 and 8:19

Now, all this was not good enough for the hyper religious Pharisees. They fasted twice a week, on Mondays and Thursdays. And they evidently did it as a public show. So, while John's disciples were probably truly devout followers and were focused on issues that were fitting to be fasting about, the Pharisees followers were probably a little "put out" that **their expressions** of spirituality were costing them some discomfort, and it was a discomfort that Christ didn't include in his list of current spiritual exercises.

So the Pharisees would be looking on, keenly sensitive to the great spirituality they themselves display, they would be wondering who does Christ think He is? He isn't even as spiritual as we are. So maybe their questions are sincere. Or maybe they are jabs intended to imply Christ's inferiority.

Either way, Christ's answers will take care of both the sincere and insincere questioners, showing both of them the error of their thinking.

"Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?" (NKJV)

That is a beautifully concise and honest question. And it is one that Christ will logically and simply answer. And then he will deal with it conceptually by means of a parable.

19 And Jesus said to them, "Can the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast. 20 But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days.

Fasting is associated with grief, with loss, with sorrow, with regret. When employed spiritually it is normally with the intention of seriously imploring God to move on our behalf. Jesus has nothing bad to say about fasting. But He does have something to say about the general misunderstanding of the populace about what is going on.

Jarrold, suppose on the week before you got married all your friends were to refuse to eat. Suppose they were absolutely glum. Suppose they appeared to be mourning but no one had died. I don't think you would have thought that to be appropriate behavior. Wouldn't it be more appropriate for them to be happy for you and with you? Why? Because you were about to celebrate something that you viewed as being very joyful. A significant event in your life.

Suppose we are a friend of the groom. Even if we had other concerns at the time, would we bring them front and center and make them the focus of this event? I am not the most incredibly socially adept person, but even **I** know it is inappropriate to rain on someone else's parade. The focus should be, in an event like a marriage, to share in the joy of the person getting married.

That is the reason that Christ presents to answer the question that they asked him. Why don't my disciples fast? Because, given this present setting, the bridegroom is present.

Mark says, Can the friends of the bridegroom fast?

Matt says, Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn?

But I think granting even more clarity...

Luke says, Can you **make** the friends of the bridegroom fast?

"Making them" implies that it is something that is against their will. And I think this lets us know more about what Jesus intended with this statement. It isn't that the friends of the bridegroom might **want** to mourn, but they are too polite to do so. It isn't that they are **forcing themselves** not to fast, even though that might be what they naturally do. No. The intent here is clearly to say that having the bridegroom present is such a joy to these friends that to do anything but celebrate with him would be a chore. In fact Mark says that as long as the groom is with them, they **CANNOT** fast. They aren't even capable of it. You can't make them. What is being emphasized here is the importance of the groom. These friends understand the significance of this event. They understand the joy that is appropriate when eating at the same table with the Messiah of the world. They have Immanuel- God with us- with them. **Now is not the time** for mourning. In fact, they cannot even **be made to** mourn. Because they get it. They understand the significance of being with Christ. They don't get it perfectly, but they get it sufficiently.

Note too that this only applies to the **friends** of the groom. There are plenty of people for whom Christ **will not** have this effect. He should have this effect on everyone, but He will not. When a person is chosen by God, a miracle happens whereby a person loves Christ. You cannot make them stop. You might be able to distract them. You can certainly make them fail Christ. But you cannot dislodge the miracle that Christ has done to them. They will be irresistibly drawn to God. And they will know that this is the most significant drive and destiny in their lives.

Now, when Christ said **this** He was saying a mouthful. He was essentially saying that, as long as Christ was on this planet, anyone who was truly spiritual should be sharing in the joy of His presence to the degree that celebration would be more of their mindset than mourning. If the world would get who Christ really is, they would feel like partying because Christ is with them.

Christ is essentially telling the questioners that He, Christ, IS the long awaited hope of the Jews. He is that one. He is that significant. Wow. The listeners would have understood this. They would have understood it as being either the **most monstrous arrogance** or the **greatest news**. Christ is the promised Bridegroom, come to seek and to save the lost. While He is on this planet the spiritually alert should rejoice to have Him.

Then Christ goes on.

20 But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days.

Christ always knew how things would work out. The words for “be taken away” are very forceful words. So Christ is saying that there will come a time when mourning and fasting will be both appropriate and congruent. Christ is going to be violently jerked out of the disciples’ lives. Those who are spiritually alert at that time will find themselves fasting and mourning.

So we see that Christ is **not against fasting**. But **He IS** for understanding the times and the importance of His presence on planet earth.

Luke tells us that then Jesus spoke a parable to them: Then it continues.

21 No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; or else the new piece pulls away from the old, and the tear is made worse. 22 And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine bursts the wineskins, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins.” (NKJV)

Now, the question was about fasting. Christ’s first response was about the importance of the **person being present** as the reason for the **lack** of fasting.

What Christ says next is nothing short of earth shattering.

What Christ talks about next is the whole idea of the spirituality behind the acts of fasting and the like. Why were these disciples of John and the Pharisees fasting?

It was based in a system of law and ceremony. It was a system that was pointing forward to a Savior. It was a system looking forward to a Messiah, an eternal kingdom, and majestic King. It was looking forward to something that **it was not**.

Christ begins to talk about the incongruity of **the new and the old**. But he doesn’t lay it out in clear teaching. He uses a parable to at least keep some of a veil on it.

Those who really wanted to know could understand. But those who wanted to hang Christ by his words would have difficulty using His quotes to hang Him.

So first, Christ, the arrival of the bridegroom, is the reason that things that were appropriate **before His arrival** no longer are. And when He leaves, it will again be appropriate.

Now he talks about the problems of the new and the old, with the obvious implication that before the Bridegroom arrived there was the old. Now that the Bridegroom is here, we have the new.

21 No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; or else the new piece pulls away from the old, and the tear is made worse.

Christ is presenting here something that everyone in that culture would have easily understood. They knew that new cloth shrinks. So if you put a cloth that is **sure to shrink** on a cloth that is sure **not to shrink**, the new cloth will gather the old cloth to itself and it will make things worse.

The point is that you cannot mix the new and the old. There must be a new beginning. If something is very different from what came before it, you cannot join the two together.

22 And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine bursts the wineskins, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins."

Wine used to be kept in freshly tanned goatskins. As the wine would work, the skins would stretch. In that way the wine was kept away from air and it didn't need to be moved from container to container. But evidently the wine would stretch the skin as far as it could be stretched. If you then, tried to put new wine in that old wine skin, the new wine would stretch it past its breaking point.

And note what he says about the effect. Both the new and the old are ruined when something like this is tried. Everyone knows this and so no one would do it. Then Luke adds a little more.

Luke 5:38 But new wine must be put into new wineskins, and both are preserved. 39 And no one, having drunk old wine, immediately desires new; for he says, 'The old is better.' " (NKJV)

So Christ is saying that the new must come. Both the new thing and the new container for the new thing are necessary. A change is needed to have the new thing without it being destroyed or destroying. The new things preserve each other.

But what is the most common response to all this? What will be the response to the most significant spiritual change in all human history?

The fleshly response by those who were in the old system, those who were entrenched in what went on before, their response is immediately, on first impulse- I don't like it. I don't like the new. I want the old. The old is better.

I work in the technical world. A large part of my job is initiating changes that allow us to do things easier, faster and better. That is what my boss wants me to do. So I do it.

But every day I run into resistance. And often it is by people who understand **what** we are doing. They understand **why** we are doing it. They understand the benefit it grants. They even could argue **the sense** that it makes. They even see that it will make their lives easier. But they still gripe. Why? They even **know why**. They will tell me. "I hate change" they will say.

We tend to prefer the familiar. We like to do things the same way. We don't have to think about it. There is something secure in it. For instance, how would you feel if next week we completely reversed the service? Would there be anything wrong with that? No. But it is not what we expect.

Well, that human tendency was very dangerous in the time of Christ. Because there were changes coming that were drastic. And they were absolutely necessary. They were the fulfillment of all that came before. The new **could not** be placed in the old. So, while immediately no one was going to say, man I like the new so much better. Eventually it was required for people to do so. No one was going to be saved by being a good religious Jew from the time of Christ on.

I think we can find an application for us here. Not all change is good and not all change is necessary. But when God's word requires change, we must learn to embrace it. Isn't it like us to recoil away from God or His messengers when the message to us is that **we must change**? Aren't we often afraid? We are afraid that we can't accomplish the change that is necessary. Or we **like our lives** the way they are and we think we are being wise to do things the way we are doing them. Sometimes it is that simple. We simply prefer not to change. And sometimes we really don't know **How to make the change** that is necessary. Sometimes we are not convinced that God knows what He is talking about when He tells us we must change.

We all have our reasons. But there is one thing that is for sure. Every single one of us must change. If we are still breathing, it is because there are still things that need changed. So we do well to go to Christ with a willingness to change if He will show us how. That is a prayer He will answer. It is surely in His will and in His name.

Now, what was Christ talking about when He talked about the old and the new? We will spend the rest of this morning talking about this.

The old

God very clearly chose the Jewish people to be His people. God was going to reveal Himself to the world through these people. So He gave them a law. They were to follow the law. In that law were ceremonies. The people were to do those ceremonies. And all these things pointed forward to something that was to come.

Now, how were sins forgiven? When people recognized that they had sinned, or even sometimes in case they had unknowingly sinned, they were to make a sacrifice. An innocent lamb or other animal was sacrificed. And God received that offering and overlooked the sin. The sin would ultimately be forgiven by the shed blood of Christ, who was coming in the future.

So the temple continually had the slaughtering of animals taking place. It would have been a bloody gory business. But it was necessary. And it all pointed forward. Most Jewish people didn't understand that the sacrificial system was temporary. Naturally, it was a huge part of their understanding of their Jewish religion. They would have thought things would always be like they were right then.

But then Christ came. He predicted this change. He warned people of the huge difference between the old and the new. And how there was no patching the old system. It could not be patched. And it was not intended to be patched. It was going to be new.

Then Christ died. And probably the defining event that most clearly demonstrated the end of the old and the beginning of the new was the curtain in front of the Holy of Holies ripping in half from top to bottom, something only God could do.

At that point in history God displayed, in a very clear fashion, that the old way of doing business was over. The curtain no longer was necessary because His presence was no longer going to reside there. And forgiveness would no longer be found there by animal sacrifices. God, Himself, performed this clarifying event so there would be no debate when the old ended and the new began.

This curtain was probably 60 feet high. It was 4 inches thick. Josephus recorded that the curtain could not be ripped by horses tied to each side.

Do you see just what a defining event this was? There was never going to be another priest going behind that curtain representing man with an animal's blood.

Hebrews 10:1 For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. 2 For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins. 3 But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. 4 For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins. 5 Therefore, when Christ came into the world, He said: "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, But a body You have prepared for Me. 6 In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure. 7 Then I said, 'Behold, I have come-- In the volume of the book it is written of Me-- To do Your will, O God.' " 8 Previously saying, "Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them" (which are offered according to the law), 9 then He

said, "Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God." He takes away the first that He may establish the second. 10 By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all*. (NKJV)

This is the new and the old. The Jews were under the old covenant that was given to the Jewish fathers. But Christ initiated the **new covenant** with His blood. The law would be written on human hearts now, not on stone. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit would enable people to fulfill the righteousness of the law Rom 8:1-4 And forgiveness of sin for humans would be found in only one place- the completed work of Christ on the cross. The payment for every sin was finished at the very moment the curtain was torn. Sin would no longer separate us from God if we are in Christ. We can freely cross the once uncross- able divide.

As we read through Acts we find that Jewish Christians still participated in some Jewish functions. They still kept various aspects of the law. The lines are often blurry what they should and should not have kept. We eventually find many of the ceremonial laws ignored by the new believers. But the one line that would have clearly created a division between the old and the new would have been the **sacrifice for sin**. For a believer to sacrifice an animal for sin would be a great offense to Christ. A believer in Christ had to part ways there. This would have been the clearest way to determine which Jews were Christians and which ones were not. And naturally, it would be very offensive to those in the old system to see Jews who would **no longer make animal sacrifices**. That would have created a great deal of animosity.

And also the means of salvation had changed. A Jewish believer would no longer try to make a Gentile join the Jewish religion and go through all those motions in order to get right with God.

From the day that Christ died, salvation was clearly understood to be by faith alone by grace alone. Any human was now welcome to come to God through the blood of Christ. They simply had to trust that Christ's completed work counted for them by faith. They must confess with their mouth and believe in their heart that Jesus is Lord.

The old wineskin would have never allowed for those things. It would have tried to make the new stay in the old restraints. But such a thing could not happen. The new was truly new and needed a whole new container. We call it the church of Christ.