

## Fast or Feast? (part 2)

Often when people call on God, they're not looking to make a big change. We just need a little help with a problem. We're not looking to put God first in everything; we just want Him to keep us from getting laid-off. They're not looking to "take up their cross and follow Him"; they just want Him to pull their 23-year-old back from the drug lifestyle He's in. They're not looking to make God the love of their lives; they just want Him to heal the cancer.

What many basically say to God is this: "Just fix my problem, God, please. . . and leave the rest of my life alone!" (Not that we'd be so rude as to say it like that.). Many people want help without giving up the control. The problem with this attitude is that it will put us in conflict with the Lord Jesus.

Jesus had many conflicts with people, particularly with the religious establishment, who wanted a little of what Jesus had to offer, but they also wanted to be in control. This section of Mark is the center of a series of five stories of conflict and controversy that began with the opening of chapter 2. Jesus challenged the beliefs and traditions of the religious people of His day because too often their religion and their traditions got in the way of having a real relationship with God. Jesus was always stretching wineskins with new wine ... the problem was that the old whiners couldn't take it and they burst with anger.

Our text today is:

### **Mark 2:18-22**

- 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."**

### **Question: What about Fasting?**

Last week we saw that John the Baptist's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees came and asked Jesus why His disciples weren't fasting, but feasting.

And of course, everything that Jesus does is on purpose. He is making a point here. Last week we saw the first point is:

### **1. God's Kingdom Is Like A Wedding, not a Funeral (2:19,20)**

**Jesus Came to Bring Gladness, not Sadness.** We learned that there is a time for fasting and mourning but not when the Messiah is here and bringing the joy of salvation and deliverance.

## **2. God's Kingdom Is Like A Suit of New Clothes (2:21)**

### **Jesus Came to Bring the New, Not Patch the Old**

Here's the second illustration, of clothing. Verse 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**'. What Jesus is saying here is: 'If I take this new cloth, the preaching of the Kingdom of grace, and try to patch up your old dead religion, it will tear it apart!' Jesus' point is this: 'I have not come to do a patch up job on your old religious traditions. My intention in coming into this world is not to prop up dead religion, but to bring a new relationship. It is the cloth of grace, and it can't patch up the worn out garment of the rules and regulations of the Old Testament. The law was given by Moses, John the gospel writer said, but grace came through Jesus Christ.

Patch Point 1: Jesus is not into patchwork. He doesn't want to "patch-up" your old lifestyle or just be used as a temporary patch. He wants to give you a brand new lifestyle! Besides, you can't patch sinfulness. It must be dealt with at the core. You can't just wear some Jesus on your old self, you have to put Him on. "**For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.**" (Galatians 3:26,27).

Jesus used this picture to show us that He came to completely transform the lives of His followers - not merely patch up their old lives. JESUS DOES NOT JUST "PATCH-UP" YOUR OLD LIFE. HE MAKES ALL THINGS NEW!

Patch Point 2: If you are going to follow Jesus, He expects to be your whole wardrobe, not just a patch. Jesus came to cleanse our hearts and to outfit us in a whole new lifestyle wardrobe that would testify of His great grace. The theological term is regeneration, a new creation. "**Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.**" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Patch Point 3: The old garments must be laid aside and the garments of Christ must be worn. "**that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.**" (Ephesians 4:22-24).

Jesus came to call sinners. It is only the self-righteous who shunned Jesus, for Jesus came to forgive sinners and to have fellowship with them. You cannot be too sinful for God to save, or too holy not to need His salvation.

## **3. God's Kingdom Is Like New Wine - 2:21**

Let's move on to this third illustration which is wine. In verse 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.**

Jesus referred to an ancient practice in which “the skins of goats were stripped off as nearly whole as possible and partly tanned, so they could be filled with new wine. Their natural elasticity and strength would allow the fermenting new wine to expand. However, if new wine was put into old wineskins, their brittle, inflexible condition would cause them to burst and both wine and wineskins would be lost. The new life that Christ brings is expanding.

Now what is Jesus talking about? The new wine is the joy and the power that Christ brings, and the old wineskins are the form and ritual of dead Judaism. What He is saying is that new wine needs new skins. His point is that there is no use for you disciples of John the Baptist, and for you followers of the Pharisees to put My disciples, Jesus says, under the bondage of sorrowful fasting as it has been practiced in the past. It won't work, because the joy and effervescence of the new life in Christ must be allowed to spring forth, must be allowed to express itself!

Christianity has always suffered from man's attempt to mix it with legalism. The Lord taught on this portion of Scripture, categorically and explicitly, that the two don't mix - they don't mix! So stop trying to mix them! Jesus taught that legalism is a cancer that kills new life, and if you don't believe me you need to see the Gospels, and you need to see how serious this legalism was. Because of Christ's non-observance of these fast days, because He broke the pharisaical interpretation of the Sabbath that we'll see in our next study in the following verses of this chapter, it was because of these things that verse 6 of chapter 3 says they began to devise a way, take counsel of how they might destroy Him! That's how serious legalism is: it leads you to extinguish the presence of Christ - and if you can't celebrate His presence, that's the only other alternative, you extinguish it, whether you're conscious of it or not.

In Kansas we had a couple of oaks trees in the front yard at home. They provided great shade in the summer months. But those trees do not lose their leaves in the fall. The dead, brown leaves hang on those limbs until spring time comes.

When spring comes, the sap rises in the tree. The new buds being to push out from the end of the branches, and the old leaves are forced to fall away. The new life in the tree expands and causes that which is dead to fall away!

That is exactly what Jesus wants to do in our lives! The old ways of sin and self will hang on for as long as they can. Religion, religious rituals and the traditions of men will not repair your old man; those things merely hold him down for a little while.

When Jesus moves in, He creates a new life within you. The new life He places in you begins to work its way out of you. Before long, what the Lord has done on the inside becomes clear on the outside as He changes the old man into a new creature for the glory of the Lord. The new wine of Jesus on the inside will burst the wineskin of the old man on the outside. This old flesh cannot contain the work of God in the heart!

As Jesus fills the wineskin of our lives, He stretches us to new limits. The inner pressure of His presence displaces unneeded things and fills every area of our

lives. This new life is so powerful, so dynamic and so different that the old wineskins of religion and old ways of living must give way to the new life He places within us.

Let me make it clear that Jesus did not come to destroy the Law, He came to fulfill it, Matt. 5:17. Jesus filled full the moral law in that He kept it to the letter. Jesus filled full the ceremonial law in that He was the absolute perfect fulfillment of every type, symbol and sacrifice. Jesus filled full the judicial law in that He was the perfect embodiment of justice. When He comes in, He comes with such fullness that there is no desire for the old garment or the old wineskin.

It's like an acorn. You can take a rock or a hammer and smash an acorn, or you can plant that same acorn and let it germinate into an oak. Either way, the acorn is destroyed. If you smash it, it is gone forever. If it grows into an oak, it has achieved its fullest potential.

Jesus comes into our hearts not to place us under the yoke of the Law, but to enable us to live out God's perfect will through the power of the Holy Ghost. Jesus doesn't smash us under the Law; He places His Law within our hearts and helps us achieve God's best in our lives. He comes in to enable us to live our lives to the glory of God. The Law could never do that!)

Conc: Jesus did not come to blend His new way with old ways of living and believing. Jesus came to redeem sinners and give them new life in Him. That is why salvation is referred to as a "new birth", John 3:3, 7.

What God is saying through the Lord Jesus here is that there is a perpetual wedding joy with Christ for those who will have it: a feast, not a famine; new clothes, not patched up rags; new wine in new wineskins. Do you think it's a coincidence that the early church, in Acts chapter 2, were accused of being drunk? Is that a coincidence? Now they weren't rolling around, and barking, and roaring like a lion - but they were filled with so much joy that the people said: 'Nobody could be full at this time of the morning!', but they were filled with the Spirit of God! It told on their face, in the way they sang, in the way they preached, the way they prayed!

I am inviting you to exit, if you're in it, legalism to the glory of God with a leap and a bound, and sit with the Lord Jesus and join Him in the feast of joy with publicans and sinners. Leave the fast and formalism and dead religion, and know the joy of the Lord which is your strength. Have you got it? There's no joy in keeping rules, because you can't keep them, you'll always fail - but there is joy as a fruit of the Spirit, where you're not drunk with wine wherein is excess, but filled - that word means 'controlled constantly' - by the Spirit. Is it a feast or a famine? Is it the old, or is it the new?