

## **Jesus Answers the Disciples of John** **Matthew 9:14-17; Mark 2:18-22; Luke 5:33-39**

This incident of Christ seems to be a continuation of questioning at or near the time of Matthew's feast. This question concerning fasting is generated by the disciples of John the Baptist. Jesus is going to enunciate a great principle and reveal the fact that sweeping changes are coming and the old and new cannot mix.

**“(“And the disciples of John and of the Pharisees used to fast (Gk - were fasting): and they come” Mark 2:18) And they said unto him, Why do the disciples of John (“and the Pharisees” Matthew 9:14) fast often, and make prayers, and likewise the disciples of the Pharisees; (“but thy disciples fast not?” Matt. 9:18) but thine eat and drink?” Luke 5:33**

### **I. Question Concerning Jesus' Disciples' Lack of Fasting**

- “disciples of John” – It is interesting to note that John the Baptist still had loyal disciples at this time despite that: 1) he has been in prison for some time at the palace of Machaerus for preaching against the adultery of Herod Antipas and soon would be martyred. 2) had counseled his disciples to acknowledge Jesus as Messiah and follow Him. (*More disciples of John are found in Acts 18-19.*) Those who remained as John the Baptist's followers primarily had Old Testament and Pharisee tendencies. Why were these men here at the feast of Matthew? It is possible they were following Jesus because their Master was in prison. They could have been observing Him and hearing His teachings but had not committed to Him. There was a very real contrast between Jesus and John the Baptist. They had the same message, but John was the forerunner – Jesus was the Messiah! (John 3:28-36) (*Name some differences – moved about more, healing, said He was the Messiah, interacted with people more*) Most believe the Pharisees were whispering in the ears of these disciples of John, seeking to blemish Jesus in their eyes and set a division between them. The Religious Leaders have done this before. (John 3:25)
- “fasting” – The law only cited the need to fast once a year on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29-31) Over the centuries, a tradition of fasting twice a week, Mondays and Thursdays, had developed. (Matt. 6:16-18; Luke 18:11-12) All Religious Leaders and pious Jews would faithfully adhere to this tradition in the strictest way!
- “the disciples of John and of the Pharisees used to fast:” – The phrase “used to fast” in Greek means, “are/were fasting.” Many English translations give this rendering. It has been suggested, these disciples of John stood alongside pious Pharisees on the outside of Matthew's grand house. The scent of fine food was in the air, all in the honor of Jesus of Nazareth. It probably added to the confusion in the minds of John's disciples; their beloved teacher lay in the dungeon east of the Dead Sea while Jesus and His disciples ate and drank the nicest of delicacies.

I want you to see the two parts of the question. The prideful side when stating the fasting and prayers of the Pharisees and John's Disciples versus the condemning portion of no fasting of Jesus' disciples.

- “Why do the disciples of John (“and the Pharisees” Matthew 9:14) fast often, and make prayers,” –Don't miss **“and make prayers.”** Only Luke adds this phrase and Jesus does not address it. We know the

Pharisee's prayers were repetitive, Jewish liturgical, recited prayers. Most are based on Old Testament passages. Jesus will criticize these types of repetitive prayers in the Sermon on the Mount and will teach His disciples to pray using the Lord's Prayer. It alludes to the fact that John had taught his disciples to pray in Luke 11:1. Being the last of the prophets with the message of repentance and the soon coming of the Messiah, it is certain these would also be themes of his prayers.

- “but thy disciples fast not?/“but thine eat and drink?” – Here is the issue of the question – why don't Jesus' disciples fast? Why are they eating while we are fasting?

“And he (“Jesus” Matthew 9:15)) said unto them, Can ye make the children of the bridechamber (Lit. - wedding guests – Lit. - the disciples) fast (“mourn” Matthew 9:15), while the bridegroom is with them? (“as long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast.” Mark 2:19) <sup>35</sup>But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away (Gk - violently removed) from them, and then shall they fast in those days.” Luke 5:34-35

## II. Jesus Teaching Concerning Fasting

- “Can ye make the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them?”/“as long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast.” – A wedding feast was the highest level of all celebrations in the Jewish culture. It would supersede all other Jewish activities. Edershiem said the days of a wedding feast would cancel out all other Jewish feast days or requirements. It was always an important time of joy and rejoicing! It is wonderfully interesting that John the Baptist, the teacher of these questioning disciples, used this same illustration when speaking of Jesus. (John 3:28-30) John had called Jesus the “bridegroom” and Jesus will use this reference with his disciples in return. The Scriptures often compare Christ to a Bridegroom and God's people the bride. (Is. 62:5; Matt. 25:1-14 - Parable of the Ten Virgins; Rom. 7:4; Rev. 21:2) Jesus' message was one of “good news.” (Mark 1:14-15) Matthew's feast was a natural outpouring of his finding the good news! Fasting is a time of need and grief, not joy! Joy and feasting were appropriate while Christ was with them!
- “the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days.” – “shall be taken away” – this has the thought of being violently taken or removed from them; not Jesus leaving or walking away but Jesus will cruelly be taken for trials and later crucified. This is not the storyline for a bridegroom! They are not violently taken away; Jesus is speaking of Himself and His future. It is then, Jesus assumes they will fast, not imposed for merit's sake but out of anguish, sorrow, and desiring direction from God. Jesus emphasizes fasting for the right reasons.

## III. Jesus Teaches Concerning the Old and New Way

**Parable Defined:** These are the first parables of Jesus recorded in the gospels. **Parable** – a simple event taken from daily life by which Jesus will convey a spiritual teaching. They revealed truth to those who could discern it and concealed mysteries from those who were not ready for them. (Matthew 13:10-13) Both of these have the same meaning – the new causes the old to become useless - with a slightly different twist on the details. Only Luke will call these parables.

## Parable of the Garment:

**“And he spake also a parable unto them; No man putteth (“seweth” Mark 2:21) a piece of a new garment (“cloth” Matthew 9:16) (Lit. - unshrunk material) upon an old; if otherwise, then both the new maketh a rent, and the piece that was taken out of the new agreeth not with the old. (“else the new piece that filled it up taketh away from the old, and the rent is made worse.” Mark 2:21) Luke 5:26**

- The Parable – This story comes from the world of mending clothes. Really this is something our grandmas did much more than ourselves. The picture is of a woolen garment that has a hole in it. Jesus is saying one would never take a new, unshrunk piece of woolen fabric and patch the old garment with it. When it is wet or washed, the new patch will shrink tearing the old fabric with it.
- The Parable’s Meaning – Don’t forget Jesus is addressing the question about fasting. This was almost all done as a Jewish tradition. Jesus had a new Gospel of repentance from and forgiveness of sin! It was not connected to the old external Jewish traditions of self-righteousness and rituals. Jesus will not patch up or reform the old ways but instead He had a new way; new life, new beginning, new purpose, new faith in His work, and then from the heart of His followers' service and righteousness. Just as in the parable, the best choice is to discard the old garment that has completed its usefulness and take on a new white one, this one washed in the blood of our Savior. Later, in the book of Acts, the Jews will need to learn the practices and traditions of Judaism cannot be forced on the new church of believers.

## Parable of the Wine Skins:

**“And no man putteth new wine (Lit. - fresh grape juice) into old bottles (Lit. - used goat skins); else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled (“runneth out” Matthew 9:17), and the bottles (“will be marred:” Mark 2:22) shall perish. <sup>38</sup>But new wine must be put into new bottles; and both are preserved. <sup>39</sup>No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new: for he saith, The old is better.” Luke 5:37-39**

- The Parable – Here is another earthly illustration that helps one understand the plan of God. This is even more foreign to our experience than mending clothes. What is described is the practice of storing wine. New wine was prepared and then placed in newly tanned goat skins, as it fermented, the skins would stretch. Then they would be tossed away after each use. One would never use it again; it would not be able to stand up to a second stretching.
- The Parable’s Meaning – The old systems of Judaism were done, and a new worship was beginning. Jesus said the same to the woman at the well in John 4:21-23. There He said, “Woman, believe me, the hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father...But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.” The greatest proof of God’s mind on the passing of the sacrificial system and all its rituals was the tearing of the veil at the time of Christ’s death. Jesus had fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies, types, and demands of the law. He ended the sacrifices as the perfect Sacrifice! John 1:17 This was the message of Jesus here and will later become a reoccurring theme to the Jewish believers in the Epistles. Rom. 8:1-4; Heb. 8:6-13; 10:1
- “No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new: for he saith, The old is better.” – This last phrase is unique to Luke’s gospel. This is an ironic statement of Jesus, many Jews loved their

traditions and ways; they would not consider the new. But that is the default of man – we dislike change. Unfortunately, the Jewish people will be forced away from their cherished Jewish traditions in 70 AD when the Temple along with their whole existence is destroyed with the conquering of Titus. Hos. 3:4

### **Believer's Application:**

1. Let's take a look at "fasting" in the New Testament church.

**What Fasting is Not** - There is no spiritual merit or bonus points in fasting! This seems to have been the desire of many sincere people over the centuries, a type of self-infliction, self-punishment, mortification, or depressing the body. This type of fasting can easily foster pride in the heart and judgmental attitudes toward others. We see this in the Pharisees and John's disciples in today's lesson.

**What is Fasting** – John R Rice, the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century evangelist said, "There is no spiritual virtue in fasting itself but only in the attitude of mind that seeks to find God's will and blessing, and thus gladly for a time leave off normal enjoyments and comforts." JRRice p. 151 We find fasting in the book of Acts several times, usually, they were "seeking God's will or blessing." Also, fasting can be found when experiencing great sorrow and with the repentance of sin. It's not a command, not a show to others, but a quiet, intense prayer time seeking God.

2. Just as the Jewish rituals and traditions could not be mixed with the grace of the Gospel, so we must be careful not to take on new rituals and traditions or try to put these on others. "Our church programs and ministries should not be so structured that they have no room for a fresh touch of the Spirit, a new method, or a new idea. We, too, must be careful that our hearts do not become so rigid that they prevent us from accepting the new way of thinking that Christ brings." LAB p. 1724

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we can also get caught up in man-made traditions and ways. People can get very protective of their favorite religious customs. We must ask ourselves, Are our guidelines for living and worship God-made or man-made?

Name changes churches have seen over the last 30-40 years: (*Some can be hard for us old-timers!*)  
Service schedule – adding or taking away services; clothing – in church and on platform; music – songs, instruments; Bible versions, church service flow, church name; church building look, ect

Name unchangeable Principles of Scripture:

- **Gospel is clear** – man's need because of sin, repentance, faith in Christ = New Life - pulpit ministry, outreach
- **Making Disciples** – opportunities for Bible study and growth
- **Christ-centered** – pulpit, music, teaching, worship
- **Doctrines of Scripture** – Salvation by faith, Security of the Believer, Baptism of believers, separation from sinful practices, preaching against sin