

Do not fast while you have the Bridegroom

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[0 : 00] and we shall read verses 18 to 22. Mark's Gospel, chapter 2, and at verse 18.

And the disciples of John and of the Pharisees used to fast. And they come and say unto him, Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but thy disciples fast not?

And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bride chamber fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. But the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days. No man also saweth a piece of new cloth and an old garment, else the new piece that filled it up taketh away from the old, and the rent is made worse. And no man putteth new wine into old bottles, else the new wine doth burst the bottles, and the wine is spilled, and the bottles will be marred. But new wine must be put into new bottles.

Conflicts were beginning to arise between the Pharisees and Jesus. You notice how in chapter 2 and verse 7, they accuse Jesus of speaking blasphemy. Who can forgive sins but God only? You remember the man who was suffering from the palsy, who was lying on the bed there, paralyzed. And Jesus said to him, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee. And they began to say, Who? Who can say thy sins be forgiven thee? What right has Jesus to say this? He is taking the place of God.

[2 : 23] And of course he was taking the place of God, because he is God. The leaders of the Jews were complaining. And then, chapter 2, verse 16, they complained that he was eating and drinking with publicans and sinners.

This is not right, they were saying. Here's this man who claims to be a holy man and a good man and a teacher. And he's eating food and he's mixing around with the riffraff, with sinners, with the worst of people.

It cannot be right. Jesus, if he is a holy man, should keep well away from all sinners. But you remember how Jesus answered them. They who are whole, they who are healthy, don't need a physician, but those who are sick.

I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. These very people, the publicans and the sinners, these are the ones that I have come to save.

And my whole ministry concentrates on them. These are the ones whom I wish to deliver. And now they come to him on the question of fasting.

[3 : 47] And on the question of Sabbath observance. And they criticize Jesus and his disciples because they are not following their customs as far as fasting and Sabbath observance are concerned.

And so eventually, the conflict becomes so bad that in chapter 3 and verse 6, they plot to kill Jesus. Friends, you cannot get through this life and be faithful to God without conflicts, without trials and troubles.

Jesus himself said to us, beware when all men speak well of you. There is something far wrong if everyone is praising you.

Because if you identify closely with Christ, then you will give offence to people. You will hurt people, you will anger them. And so, they will respond against you.

[4 : 56] Blessed are you when men shall revile you and persecute you and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake.

Rejoice and be exceeding glad. For so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

Anyone who identifies with Christ and anyone who follows in the prophetic mold of Jesus and his disciples will have to face conflict.

Conflict within and without. Conflict in the church and conflict outside. Here we find Jesus involved in a ministry of mercy.

Showing such kindness and such love and speaking only the truth. And yet, time and again, they are criticizing him and condemning him.

And pointing the finger against him. And eventually, plotting to kill him. They long to be rid of this Jesus who upsets their lives.

[6 : 10] Peace will only be attained by God's people in heaven. In this world, it is war.

The church militant. The church fighting. Fighting for Christ. Fighting for the kingdom of Christ.

Fighting against the devil.

Fighting against the world. Fighting against the flesh within. There remains a rest for the people of God across the Jordan in the promised land above.

In this world, there will be trials and troubles. Coming in directly to the passage in front of us. What is fasting?

Verse 18. The disciples of John and of the Pharisees used to fast. Well, literally, fasting is stopping from eating food. You know how each morning you have your breakfast.

[7 : 20] You break fast. Because you fast through the night. You don't eat food through the night. And then you break your fast in the morning breakfast.

Fasting is very common in many religions. For example, the Muslims. The Muslims have the fast of Ramadan.

And for the month of Ramadan. The ninth month in the Muslim calendar. All proper Muslims are duty bound to fast.

Between sunrise and sunset. They are not to eat food. They are to fast. After sunset. When night comes.

Then you can eat as much as they like. That's during the fast of Ramadan. You know too, in the Roman Catholic Church. They have fasts. For example. They used to have a fast every Friday.

[8 : 22] It used to be forbidden for Roman Catholics to eat meat on a Friday. And so the custom arose of simply eating fish on Friday.

Because it was to be a fast. And you know how they have the fast of 40 days before Easter. The fast of Lent.

Again they deny themselves. They are supposed to deny themselves something during the time of Lent. Now the only stipulated fast in the scriptures.

In the Old Testament. Is the Day of Atonement. On the Day of Atonement. All Israelites were duty bound to fast.

Not allowed to eat any food that day. The Day of Atonement was a great day of repentance in Israel. It was the day when they confessed their sin.

[9 : 22] And they humbled themselves before the Lord. And they cried to the Lord for mercy. It was the day when they killed the sin offerings.

And the high priest. That one day in the year. Took the blood of the sin offering. And went right in. Not just into the holy place in the temple.

But into the holy of holies. Into the inner sanctuary of the temple. And sprinkled the blood upon the mercy seat. Over above the Ark of the Covenant.

In the holy of holies. Asking the Lord to have mercy upon Israel. And to forgive the sins of his people. So it was a great day of repentance.

And confession and contrition. And pleading for mercy and forgiveness for sin. And it was a fast day. Now.

[10 : 28] At other times. The Israelites. Had fasts. Special fasts.

For specific occasions. In times of great trouble. Or great danger. They would fast. They would fast. Remember. When. At the end of Judges.

We're told about the Israelites. Trying to. Get rid of the terrible sin. Of the. Of the Benjamites. And. Protecting.

Those men. Gebeah. Who had been involved. In the terrible. Immorality. And. The Israelite army. The Israelite army. Fought against the Benjamites. Twice.

And both times. The Benjamites won. And you remember then. How the Israelites. Fasted. And prayed. And pleaded with the Lord.

[11 : 24] For mercy. For help. And then they went up. And they got the victory. Fasting. And the blessing came.

We read together. In the book of. In the book of Jonah. How. The prophet Jonah. Was sent to Nineveh. With a message.

Yet. Forty days. And Nineveh. Shall be destroyed. And the response. Of the Ninevites. From the king. On the throne. Down to. The poorest man.

In Nineveh. Was. To fast. A fast. Was proclaimed. And all Nineveh. Humbled themselves. And put on sackcloth. And turned away. From food.

And from work. And from everything. In order to. Plead with God. To have mercy upon them. And God. Responded to the fast. And the Nineveh.

[12:22] Ninevites. Weren't destroyed. You remember afterwards. How angry Jonah was. Because Jonah wanted. The Ninevites. Ninevites destroyed. Because he saw them. As a. A threat to Israel.

But God. God is so merciful. He loves. To be gracious. And he loves. To forgive sin. And to pardon us. And to wash away.

Our guilt. Remember David. David sinned terribly. In committing. In committing adultery. With Bathsheba. And then trying to. Cover up his sin. By murdering Bathsheba's husband. And you remember. That a child was born.

As a result of that adultery. And David was told. By Nathan the prophet. That God was aware. Of his guilt. And you remember.

[13:17] How the child became ill. And was dying. And how David. Fasted. He fasted. And he prayed.

And he humbled himself. Before the Lord. Crying for the life. Of that child. But the child died. God's judgment. Came on David.

David. Chastisement. Came on David. Because of his sin. He was forgiven. But still he was chastised.

But he fasted. Praying that the Lord would deliver. That God. Showed that it was his will. That this child.

Should die. In the book of Daniel. We read about the prophet there. How Daniel. Had been. Considering the words of Jeremiah.

[14:12] And saw that the day was. Approaching. When the exile in Babylon. Should come to an end. And you remember. How Daniel set himself.

To fasting. And to prayer. So that the Lord. Would restore again. His people. To their own land. And that the prophecy of Jeremiah. Would be fulfilled.

So then. Fasting. Was practiced. From time to time. In Israel. There was the one. Stated fast. On the day of atonement. And then from time to time. When people. Were earnest. And praying to the Lord. In distress. Or in danger.

Or in a great longing. For God's blessing. They would fast. And pray. And this fasting. Is to be found. In the New Testament too. Jesus.

[15:10] In Matthew 6. Tells us about fasting. When you fast. Anoint your face. Wash your face. Anoint your head. So that you will not appear.

Unto men to fast. But unto your. Father. Who is in heaven. Don't make a show of your religion. We read in Acts. How with fasting and prayer.

The early church set aside. Saul. And Barnabas. To be missionaries. To go out. With a gospel. So we see that. Fasting. Fasting. Was practiced. By the early church. But. Coming back to the passage. In front of us.

Why did the disciples of John fast? The disciples of John. And of the Pharisees. Used to fast. Well. You remember. John's preaching. Was a preaching of repentance.

[16:06] He kept on proclaiming. The sin of the generation. In which he lived. Generation of vipers. He called them.

Sons and daughters of snakes. And he was. Condemning all the wickedness. And all the sins. That was going on in his day. And calling upon the people.

To repent. To humble themselves. Before the Lord. And to come. And to be baptized. In the Jordan. Washing away their sin. Looking to the Lord.

In faith. To cleanse their guilt away. The disciples. Of John.

Fasted. No doubt. Fasting. For the sin. That was going on around them. And fasting. For the sin. That was in their own hearts. Humbling themselves. And crying to the Lord.

[17:01] For deliverance. For power. To the sin. That in thee. May thy people. Joy. Wilt thou not us. Revive. And no doubt also.

Looking forward. To the coming. Of the Messiah. And the ushering in. Of Messiah's kingdom. Because John was the. The forerunner. Of the Messiah. And they were fasting. And praying. That Messiah's kingdom. Would be revealed. And the day of salvation. Would come to Israel. The disciples.

Of the Pharisees. Fasted too. Of the. The rabbis. The Pharisee rabbis. Their disciples. Fasted. Why? Well no doubt.

There was. Also this. Awareness of sin. And the need to fast. Before the Lord. God. And again.

[18:00] There was a concern. Amongst the Pharisees. That Messiah would come. And they were looking forward. To that day. When. Glory would come.

To Israel. And. When. The kingdom of the Messiah. Would be revealed. In fact. Some of the Pharisees. Had become.

Such. Fasters. That. Twice a week. They fasted. On Mondays. And also.

On Thursdays. Remember the man. Who went up to the temple. To pray. The Pharisee. And the publican. And the Pharisee said. I thank thee. That I am not. As other men are. Extortioners.

Unjust. Or even as this. Publican here. I fast. Twice a week. I give tithes. Of all that I possess. He was boasting.

[18:57] Of the fact. That two days. Every week. He would eat more food. As he humbled himself. And prayed before the Lord. But you see the danger.

In these things. The danger is. That we boast. Of our fasting. Or we become. Self-righteous. In our. Religious practices.

That is dangerous. And it cannot be right. We must. Not. Put any confidence. In ourselves. Or. In our own works.

Or in our own righteousness. That completely. Undermines. Any benefit. That there might be. In our. Worship. Or in our service.

To the Lord. Self-righteousness. And pride. Is always a danger. In religion. In Isaiah 58. You find the words. In your fasts.

[19:51] You find pleasure. Fasting. Should be the very opposite. Of pleasure. And yet. The prophet Isaiah. Had to. Say to Israel.

In your fasting. You find pleasure. Because. They were proud. They were proud. Of their fasting. And they thought themselves. So great. Because of.

All their. Religious. Activities. The work. That they were doing. For God. As they saw it. Well.

The disciples. Of John. And of the Pharisees. Used to fast. Fast. No doubt. Some more genuinely. Than others. And they come. And they say.

Unto Jesus. Why do the disciples. Of John. And of the Pharisees. Fast. That thy disciples. Fast not. So why did.

[20:50] Jesus' disciples. Not fast. You notice how. Jesus responds. He asks. Another question. Can the children. At the bride chamber. Fast.

While the bridegroom. Is with them. As long as. They have the bridegroom. With them. They cannot fast. It's ridiculous. To be sorrowful. In the moment.

Of greatest joy. Messiah. Has come. His kingdom. Is here. It should be. A time. Of amazing joy. God. Became man. When he. Dwells among you. And he is. Proclaiming his kingdom. And he is. Showing his power. And his glory. And delivering men.

And women. In healing the sick. And casting out devils. In proclaiming liberty. The freedom. The joy. The salvation. Of God.

[21:45] How can you expect. My disciples. To fast. When they have. The bridegroom. With them. When they have. Their beloved. With them. When the Messiah.

Is present. In Old Testament times. They were longing. For the coming of Christ. You remember. Abraham. Jesus said. He longed. To see my day. And he saw it. And was glad. He saw it. How? With the eye of faith.

He saw. Christ coming. That he died. Before Christ came. And all the prophets. And great men. Of the Old Testament. They were longing.

And yearning. For the day. When Messiah would come. That they died. Not having obtained. The promises. But now. The bridegroom.

[22 : 44] Is here. Christ has come. Rejoice. You cannot be fasting. At such a time. But rather. Rejoicing. Because he has come. And then.

Jesus. Goes on to tell. Two parables. Two very. Similar. Parables. He says. No man. Also. Seweth a piece. Of a new cloth. On an old garment. Else a new piece. That filled it up. Taketh away from the old. And the rent. Is made worse.

You have a ragged old garment. You don't waste. Good new cloth. Patching up. A raggedy old garment. Because that would be a double waste.

First. You would be wasting the new cloth. But secondly. If you sewed a piece. Of new cloth. Onto an old garment. And then washed it.

[23 : 44] The new cloth would shrink. And the tear would be made worse. And Jesus is using this to illustrate. That old religion.

Is not to be patched up. The religion of the Pharisees. It was a self-righteousness. And you remember how Jeremiah describes self-righteousness.

As filthy rags. Rags. Yes. The raggedy garment. You clothe yourself with your good works. And you try your best.

And you do what you can. It's just rags. It's full of holes. Because you and I. Even at our very best. We are sinners. And so when we try our very best.

There's still holes in our garments. And then you come along with the religion of Jesus. And you take Jesus' religion. And you try and patch up.

[24 : 46] Your raggedy self-righteousness with the religion of Jesus. But it doesn't work. Because it's. For one thing. It's wasting the good cloth.

And for another thing. The religion of Jesus. Will just tear up your self-righteousness. Even further. The true Christian religion.

Is not to be added. To man-made traditions. The true Christian religion. Is not to be added. To self-righteousness.

Now. Old Testament religion. Was a good religion. It was a God-given religion. But it was not permanent.

It was for a time. There were the types. And the shadows. There were the sacrifices. And there were the rules. With regard to what was clean.

[25 : 47] And what was unclean. And the rules with regard to the temple. And to circumcision. And all these things. But these things were types and shadows. Till the coming of Messiah. And once Messiah comes.

These things are put behind. Because Messiah. He fulfills the Old Testament. And therefore. In this sense also.

You mustn't take the new cloth. To patch up the old garment. The old garment.

Of Old Testament religion. Has served its purpose. It's to be thrown away now. And a new garment. A totally new one used.

Not a patched up one. Not a one that involves. Today's circumcision. And sacrifices. And rules. About offerings. And blood.

[26 : 43] And clean and unclean things. And all the paraphernalia. Of the Old Testament. But a new. A new religion. Totally new.

A new and spiritual religion. Introduced by Jesus. So there's not to be a patching up.

In the sense of patching up. Your self-righteousness. And your own. Earned salvation. There's not to be a patching up. In the sense of patching up. Old Testament religion.

And then there's a third sense. There's not to be a patching up. In the sense of your own. Individual salvation.

How are you to be saved? Is it by turning over a new leaf? Is it by reforming yourself? Is it by patching up your life? Is it by trying a little bit harder.

[27 : 40] Here and there. Doing a little bit here. And a little bit there. No. It's got to be radical. It's got to be a complete new religion. It's got to be born again.

With any man being Christ. He is a new creature. Not a patched up creature. But a new creature. Old things have passed away. Behold. All things are made new.

So Jesus is saying. Don't patch up the old garment. But get a new one. I'm offering you a complete new suit of clothes. And it's offered to you free.

My perfect righteousness. To clothe you. And to hide your nakedness and shame. And then there's the parable of the wineskins.

It's the same kind of idea. No man put a new wine into old bottles. Else the new wine that bursts the bottles. And the wine is spilled. And the bottles will be marred.

[28 : 39] But new wine must be put into new bottles. Powerful new wine of the gospel. Mustn't be added to the old bottles.

It's the same idea. If you have wineskins. You don't put new wine that's still fermenting. Into old wineskins.

Otherwise. The new wine will burst. The old wineskins. And the old wineskins will be lost. And the wine will be lost. Everything is lost.

Everything is lost. By putting new wine into old bottles. But new wine is put into new bottles. And both are preserved. You mustn't take the powerful new wine of the gospel.

And put it into the pharisaical mold. The mold of self-righteous religion. You mustn't take the new wine of the gospel.

[29 : 47] And even put it into the mold of ceremonial religion of the Old Testament. Because that too is an old wineskin. It's served its generation.

But it's passed away. And you mustn't try to put the new wine of the gospel. Into an unregenerate heart.

An unconverted life. You need to be born again. And so a great message of these two parables is. That there must be a new beginning.

Totally new. New cloth. And new wineskins. It's not a patching up of the old.

It's not trying to improve your self-righteousness. And make it a little bit better. It's not trying to convert yourself by patching up your religion.

[30 : 46] But it's a completely new religion. New in Christ. The new dispensation of the covenant of grace. The new coming of Christ and the Spirit.

The new coming of Christ and the Spirit. But then, finally, Jesus says that another day is coming when fasting will be appropriate.

Verse 20. The days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them. And then shall they fast in those days.

When the bridegroom is taken away. When? When was he taken away? Well, in a sense he was taken away at the crucifixion. But then he came back on the third day.

And then he ascended up to heaven. So he was taken away in that sense. But then he came back. The Holy Spirit. On the day of Pentecost.

[31 : 46] And the Holy Spirit abides with the church forever. And so some people argue that we should never again fast or be sad.

But there are times, friends, when we are not so conscious of the presence of the bridegroom.

There are times when he seems to have withdrawn.

There are times when we feel cold and hard and empty. And it seems to us that our Savior is far away. These are the times when we should fast.

Times when the church is weak and lifeless and declining. Surely then we should fast. Surely it's appropriate in our own day to fast and to pray.

Sometimes privately. To set aside a day when... Don't need to tell anybody about it. Don't need to let anyone else know about it. But when we dedicate a day to fast before the Lord.

[32 : 57] To humble ourselves. To dedicate ourselves to prayer and to crying to the Lord. To return and to revive his cause.

And to bless, yes, ourselves as individuals. And to bless others. To bless the church in our midst and throughout our land and to the ends of the earth. Sometimes it's appropriate for us to have private fasts.

And at other times to gather together with others. Also in fasting. So that together we unite in calling upon God's name.

And in humbling ourselves before him. From time to time, as a church, we have called fast days.

So as to confess our sin. To repent and to cry unto the Lord. Now, sometimes with regard to fasting, we perhaps lay too much emphasis on staying away from food.

[34 : 04] Certainly staying away from food is part of it. But that's not the most important thing. The idea in fasting is rather to lay aside all the things of the world.

All the busyness. The cares. The duties. The work. The pleasure. Yes, and if possible even food itself. But especially to humble ourselves.

And to cry and plead with the Lord. That he would forgive us our sin. And that he would bless us. That he would raise us up.

That he would come and visit us with his salvation. This is what we need today. We need it at all times, of course.

But surely we certainly need it today. We need God to bless us. It's so easy for us to drift on through life.

[35 : 04] Day following day. Swallowed up with the cares of the world. We need to set apart times when we cry to the Lord. For mercy and for forgiveness.

And for restoration of his blessing. There are times when conscious of the sad state of God's church.

Amongst us. It is right and appropriate. To cry unto the Lord. With fasting and prayer.

That the Lord would give us to see. A great day. A day of glory. A day of salvation. A day when the churches will be growing and thriving and prospering.

A day when God's name will be honoured and glorified. A day when iniquity will hide its face with shame. Above all else this passage is calling us to genuine radical Christianity.

[36 : 11] That's what you need. What I need. Let us seek the Lord with all our heart and soul and strength and mind. And not be half-hearted.

Pretending Christians. Let us pray. Gracious God. Do thou enable us to cry unto thee for mercy. Enable us to look to thee. To seek thy face and thy favour. Grant, O Lord, that our Christianity would not be a superficial thing.

And would not be a showy thing either. That would be a real Christianity. From the heart. And genuine in our lives. Grant unto us, O Lord, that we would all be real Christians.

That we would be clothed totally with the righteousness of Christ. That we would be like new wineskins. Full of the new wine of the gospel.

[37 : 19] Full of Christ. In his name we pray. Amen. Amen.