

14Then the disciples of John came to Him, asking, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?” 15And Jesus said to them, “The attendants of the bridegroom cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast. 16“But no one puts a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and a worse tear results. 17“Nor do people put new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wineskins burst, and the wine pours out and the wineskins are ruined; but they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved.”

If we've seen anything at all in these chapters of Matthews Gospel, (BTW, we're exactly a year into this, I'll have more to say about that next week, a kind of special report on Mother's day to celebrate our first year together), back on track, looking back at Matthews gospel we could say, if we've seen anything at all, it's that the Kingdom of God lives in a seperate sphere from what is normative in this world.

Last week we talked about Jesus being countercultural. Actually, that idea barely scratches the surface.

Plop baking soda into acetic acid. Beethoven into a punk rock concert. A football bat. The King of kings into Satan's kingdom.

There's bound to be all kinds of reaction. Some explosive, like the pharisees who are already plotting murder. And some less caustic. Like the confusion of John's disciples. And some celebration.

This world is the abode of Satan. He has authority to rule here since Adam's fall. What happens when the Kingdom of God, the authority to reign of God gets introduced, in this world. That's what Matthew's gospel is about. And countercultural just begins to describe Jesus.

So, who are these disciples of John. Well, they were followers of John the baptist.

John was the first real prophet in Israel in over 400 years. It was a big deal. A really big deal. And we can imagine that there were other people in similar sympathy to Matthew. Disillusioned with the man made religion of the Pharisees. And when something real, like John showed up, there would have been great excitement.

We meet these disciples of John a few times in the gospels. Here and in Matthew 11, again. Also in John 3. Paul runs across some of John's disciples clear out in Acts 19 coming to Ephesus.

John was ascetic. His clothing was rough. Camel hair with a leather belt about the center. He ate locusts and wild honey.

That would have been the adopted life of a student of John's. Followers of John. John and Elijah had those things in common. And it pleased God for John to be the fore runner to the Christ, spoken of in Malachi.

John is very much an old testament prophet. Then comes Jesus and He doesn't look like John's style at all. Eating and drinking with Matthew and the other sinners. And the disciples of John, look at Jesus, and it's confusing.

Their question wasn't like the pharisees. It wasn't a judgement. The pharisees question very much was. The disciples of John are just trying to make 2+2 add up, and they aren't getting there.

And Jesus response is also not like His response to the pharisees. He's gracious to them.

14Then the disciples of John came to Him, asking, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?"

Fasting is so foreign to us, we need to talk about it for a minute. Why are you looking at me that way? I can tell when you're laughing with me, and when you're laughing at me.

Biblical fasting is only mentioned a couple of times by Jesus, and never is it required.

It was required in the old testament by Moses, one time, at the day of atonement. Other than that the instances of fasting we see in the Bible, if I were to guess, are about 50 - 50 positive and negative when they are referred to.

Fasting at it's best is simply a way to say, God, I humbly come to seek mercy or guidance and denying myself is simply a way to hopefully say, I mean business. This is serious enough that I'm going to channel my concentration for a time by not eating.

The infant church at Antioch, when they were seeking God's will about missions fasted together before they sent Paul and Barnabas on their way.

Pinch yourselves. Here we are. The gentile church. Arguably we're here because some people at Antioch fasted and prayed.

The other side of that coin is perhaps more common. The prophets deride the people sometimes about their fasting. Fasting is not a substitute for true righteousness or heart felt devotion.

The problem with fasting is it's an outward act that religiously oriented people who want to look and act and feel religious can do, with no connection at all to God.

Jesus says don't be like the phony pharisees and fast for all the wrong reasons. The prophets told Israel, speaking for God, well, let's just go there;

Isaiah 58

*1 "Cry loudly, do not hold back;
Raise your voice like a trumpet,
And declare to My people their transgression
And to the house of Jacob their sins.*

2 "Yet they seek Me day by day and delight to know My ways,

*As a nation that has done righteousness
And has not forsaken the ordinance of their God.
They ask Me for just decisions,
They delight in the nearness of God.*

*3 ‘Why have we fasted and You do not see?
Why have we humbled ourselves and You do not notice?’
Behold, on the day of your fast you find your desire,
And drive hard all your workers.*

*4 “Behold, you fast for contention and strife and to strike with a
wicked fist.
You do not fast like you do today to make your voice heard on
high.*

*5 “Is it a fast like this which I choose, a day for a man to humble
himself?
Is it for bowing one’s head like a reed
And for spreading out sackcloth and ashes as a bed?
Will you call this a fast, even an acceptable day to the LORD?*

*6 “Is this not the fast which I choose,
To loosen the bonds of wickedness,
To undo the bands of the yoke,
And to let the oppressed go free
And break every yoke?*

*7 “Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry
And bring the homeless poor into the house;
When you see the naked, to cover him;
And not to hide yourself from your own flesh?*

Doing everything else wrong and trying to ice it over with fasting
doesn't cut it. Sounds like a bunch of evangelicals.

*2 “Yet they seek Me day by day and delight to know My ways,
As a nation that has done righteousness
And has not forsaken the ordinance of their God.
They ask Me for just decisions,*

They delight in the nearness of God.
God is NOT impressed.

After the Babylonian captivity, Israel added a bunch of fasting that was pure exercise. Not required by God's word.

And so we see the righteous Pharisee praying thus;

'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 'I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.'...Lk. 18:11

Moses said to fast once a year. This guy fasts twice each week. Wow. Guess what. Go back to a verse we looked at last week. vs. 13 *I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."*

That righteous faster is excluded.

So we see some real viable benefits, and we see the possibility of harm. All from fasting.

My personal thought is if I know that you're fasting, it's already suspect. IF we go into our closets to fast and pray, only one person should know that.

Corporately, we aren't there. I hope some day we are. I hope some day we seek God corporately with the spirituality and reverence of the christians at Antioch.

So, the followers of John come and they're like, "if we're ever going to bring God down from heaven, wouldn't that require fasting?" "How come you guys don't fast?" "John fasted." The pharisees fast.

That's what we're trying to do. Right? Bring God down from heaven. Make Him come down out of heaven and join us in our effort by getting really really serious. Serious praying that includes serious fasting.

Oh! that you would rend the heavens and come down! Is. 64:1a

OK, but, God did come down. What you're wishing for has already happened, and you haven't caught on. God did come down. You're asking Him about fasting.

Obviously, they revere Jesus, because their guy, John, told them to revere Jesus. But they haven't caught on to who He is. Neither have the disciples, although they're farther down that road than John's disciples. Peter makes his big breakthrough in Chapter 16 of Matthew. *"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God"*. Still some time before that recognition is full.

How does Jesus answer them. "Why aren't you guys more serious about praying God down."

He doesn't just bowl them over. The Son of God is HERE boys. Hello?

Actually He's been saying that since His ministry began. Way back in Matthew 4. Right at the beginning, the first recorded thing He says.

Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. The authority to reign of God on earth is in your midst.

Listen to His answer. Only the Son of God could say this. Only the mind of the Son of God knows the perfect thing to say. Every time!

15And Jesus said to them, "The attendants of the bridegroom cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast."

It's an old metaphor. One that applies both to Israel and to the church. All of God's elect from every age will be a bride to this groom.

Israel was an unfaithful wife in Hosea. The metaphor always means spiritual fidelity. It always means intimacy. A spiritual version of the intimacy of a husband and wife. Jesus is the bridegroom.

But here we have a twist on the metaphor that's never been seen. Attendants to the bride groom. What's that?

These 12 men, chosen and called by Jesus to be with Him, are like no 12 other saints in all of history. The apostles of the church. The attendants to the bride groom.

They were unique. Everything about what God was planning to do through 12 men, that time frame in history, was unique. A few weeks ago I told you the entire Kingdom of God was in one 48 foot boat, in that storm.

Never before, never again, anything like the 12 apostles. 12 painfully ordinary men. 12 men unique in all eternity, past, present, future. The attendants of the bridegroom.

Beloved, we are not the attendants of the bridegroom. We're the bride, but these select men, were the attendants. Wow!

Something else even more unique about this metaphor. Just who is Jesus claiming to be here. It's a familiar metaphor. We're the faithful bride, and the bridegroom is . . . who? God. God.

In order for the metaphor to hold up, to synchronize with all the other times in their history that it's been used, the bridegroom can only be one person. Jesus is letting these followers of John, and indeed even his disciples in on a secret. He is claiming here to be the bridegroom, and the bridegroom is . . . God.

It's an astounding revelation. Not sure anybody put 2 + 2 together that day, but there it was. Right out in the open for everyone to hear. The pharisees that want to murder Him for blasphemy could take this and run with it. He thinks He's GOD!!

Then He says; *But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.*

Here He predicts His imminent departure. When we're present with the

Lord, there is celebration. Joy. Mirth. But days are coming when He'll be taken from them and then there will be sorrow.

Fasting is just a normal thing during times of great and stressful sorrow.

When Jesus is taken from them, these men will fast. Sorrow will come. But then He'll be raised again to life from the dead, and the fasting will be turned into such great joy that they'll go out and turn the whole world upside down.

Everything in it's time. But fasting now, while Jesus is present with them doesn't compute. Wrong thing at the wrong time.

Jesus needs to graciously help these disciples of John to understand where He's coming from. And His 2 illustrations fall perfectly in line with what He has just claimed.

Vs. 16 "But no one puts a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and a worse tear results."

Here's what we've got. You have a threadbare tunic, made of either wool or animal hide. It's thin and old. Getting sort of fragile, and a good sized hole develops.

So you cut a patch of nice new wool cloth and sew it circularly to close up the hole. Next day you're walking through the fields and a monsoon comes and soaks you, then the sun comes out and dries everything. What happens to the patch? It shrinks. As much as 40%!

What happens to the original old material under the patch. What wins. The patch wins and while it's getting 40% smaller it pulls a new bigger hole in the original garment where you sewed it in.

Hold that thought.

Vs. 17 "Nor do people put new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wineskins burst, and the wine pours out and the wineskins are ruined; but they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved."

Wineskins. If you wanted to make yourself some wine, you need a place to store it while the fermentation process takes place. Oak is hard to find. They didn't use barrels. They used animal skins.

You kill the mongrel next door that's been barking all night keeping you awake. Open him up and take everything out bones and all. Sew up the openings, and you've got a nice bag to pour some wine into.

That hyde is supple. As the fermentation of that new wine takes place, the new hyde can expand just fine with the wine. No problem. Then you drink the wine and hang the hyde up on the fence and it gets really really dry.

What happens if you pour another batch of new wine that's going to expand while it's fermenting into that bag? The pressure will explode the bag and the wine will be lost.

We've got two illustrations of innapropriately putting something into something else that can't hold it.

Jesus is telling these disciples of John, you're trying to make me fit into the idea of Judaism that you're familiar with, Old Testament Judaism and I'm not going to fit.

It won't work.

The Kingdom that Jesus was bringing was something new. Totally New. God with us.

The world wants a nice non-threatening Jesus. A great teacher. A moral example for us to follow. A prophet. A great leader of men. A political champion who could shake off Rome. A great warrior. Anything but who He really is.

A great teacher could have been folded into Judaism easily. It can accomodate that. Same, a great moral example. Nice fit with Israel. A prophet fits nicely with Judaism. No problem. Listen to how the

pharisees loved all the prophets of old (and Jesus tells them they killed them.)

Any of those personages could have been folded into national Israel and the religion of judaism. They would have welcomed a reformer. The pharisees would sit and talk all day about the necessity of being reformed. They'd have loved that. A Warrior - King. Even better.

But Jesus comes and nothing He does fits their mold. He doesn't seem too concerned about Rome. He has this annoying habit of letting the pharisees know their religion isn't cutting it. He's a complete mis-fit. When it comes to Israel, nationally and spiritually, Jesus doesn't fit.

And now He claims to be the part of the husband - bride metaphor that can only be fulfilled by one person. God.

How did that shake out for the disciples of John that day?

We don't know. He barely gets it out of His mouth and suddenly another fire erupts over here. And He's gone. And John's disciples are standing there with their mouths open, looking at each other, and thinking, did He just say what I think He just said?

What does it mean for us? Do we believe Jesus is who He said He is.

I was alive (driving for two years already) when the song, Jesus Christ Superstar was playing on the radio.

Jesus Christ. Superstar. Do you think you're who they say you are?

Unequivocally, YES! He claimed to be the bridegroom. He claimed to be different from any of the world's religions. He doesn't fit any of the world's molds. That's what he told these seekers who were trying to figure out why He didn't act or look or talk like the religion they were used to.

The bigger question for us though is, do we think He's who He says He is? What do we believe about Jesus.

This is a pretty solid group. A few Saturdays ago at the men's breakfast we talked about non-negotiable truths. And the Apostles creed came up.

I believe in God,
the Father almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried;
he descended into hell;
on the third day he rose again from the dead;
he ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty;
from there he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and life everlasting. Amen.

I hope everyone in this room could sign that confession. But, if we really believe those things about Jesus; as Francisc Schaeffer put it in the title of his book; **How should we then live.**

Here is the issue that this passage presents. People keep creating a Jesus that fits their pre-conceived idea of what they want Jesus to be.

These disciples of John had created a Jesus in their own image. But the real Jesus didn't fit.

The pharisees had a Jesus in mind who was polar opposite of this Jesus.

The world is doing that to this day. Bypassing the Jesus of the Bible that they don't like very much and re-configuring a better Jesus

according to their own likes.

The Mormons have a fanciful Jesus. A much more appealing Jesus. Sort of a fantasmagasmical Jesus. Born of human parents, a man and a woman, but not of this world. He became a god through obedience. His pleading in the garden of gethsemane where he sweated blood through the pores of his skin was a remission of sin equal or better than the cross. Oh, by the way, if you're a mormon. Look for someone who's first name is Jesus and his last name is Christ. The ignorance of an 1820's farm boy. Joseph Smith.

The muslims have a Jesus, son of Mary, who was a great prophet! Almost as great as Mohammed who runs around with all of his wives cutting anyone in half who dis-agrees with him. Yes, Jesus is next in line in importance as a prophet. And he was exhumed into heaven alive. He didn't die on a cross like those liars, those christians who invented a religion around some fantastic lie will tell you. And he's coming back to earth, alive, at the end of time to join up with the Mahdi. They, combined, will kill half the people on earth.

At least Joseph Smith and Mohammed had the multiple wives and concubines thing in common.

And on and on it goes. Meanwhile Paul says, quite clearly for anyone listening;

Gal. 1:6 - 9 I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; 7which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. 8But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! 9As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!

*2 Cor. 11:3 - 4 But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. 4For if one comes and preaches **another Jesus***

whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully.

Beloved, I want you to see the Jesus of the Bible. None of these other jesus's can forgive sins. Ours went to the cross to bear our sins away for us. Ours told the disciples of John that He is, in fact, the bride groom.

Trust me, you want to be the bride of THAT Jesus. Worship Him. Dig deep into this book with me, and discover the Jesus of the Bible. Give yourself completely to Him. Trust in Him for forgiveness of sins.