11. The Gospel of Mark—2:18-22

"Jesus and the New Covenant"

(11/8/26)

Mark 2:18–22 (NKJV)
[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."

So, what's going on here?

Well in essence we have a question asked by some of John the Baptist's disciples as to why they and the Pharisees fasted, but Jesus' disciples didn't fast.

Jesus then answer's their question with a simple response—**"Can the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them?"**

But then He adds, **"The days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days."**

After that the Lord adds something that at first glance seems to have no connection to what He has just said—in fact it's a little hard to understand what the next statement even means let alone how it fits into the context of what comes before it.

Let's study this passage out of Matthew's gospel chapter 9 starting with verse 14.

I. The Question by John's Disciples

Matthew 9:14 (NKJV)
14 Then the disciples of John came to Him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Your disciples do not fast?"

By this time John the Baptist was in prison (Matt. 4:12), he did however have many disciples that still followed him and obeyed his teachings.

Some of them came to Jesus and asked a pointed question that was more of a challenge—**"Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Your disciples do not fast?"**

In the Old Testament God really only commanded Israel to fast one day out of the year—on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. (Leviticus 23:27)

Later on, in Zechariah 8:19 we read that 4 other regular fast days had evolved commemorating 4 important days associated with the Babylonian invasion and captivity:

The fast of the tenth month mourned the siege of Jerusalem (2 Kgs. 25:1); the fourth month marked its capture (2 Kgs. 25:3); the fifth month, its destruction (2 Kgs. 25:8–10); the seventh month, the murder of Gedaliah (2 Kgs. 25:25).

By the time this question had been put to Jesus the Pharisees had added two more days per week that they fasted—Monday and Thursday. (Explain)

As you can see, fasting was usually associated with solemn occasions such as tragedy, calamity, or national sin of some kind—and because of it, it often characterized OT prophets who fasted often because their ministries consisted primarily of calling the nation to repentance.

John was the last prophet of the O.T. period (Luke 16:16) and his ministry was to call the nation to repentance in preparation for receiving their Messiah—and so John (and his disciples) fasted often.

II. The Answer of Jesus

Matthew 9:15 (NKJV)
15 And Jesus said to them, "Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast.

In those days a wedding banquet would usually last seven days, and the bridegroom would choose his best friends as attendants to be responsible for the festivities.

Jesus' response would have been easily understood by John and the Pharisees' disciples in that—at a wedding banquet there is no reason for the groom's friends to mourn because it's a happy time—<u>therefore fasting would be inappropriate</u>.

After Jesus answers their question with an illustration—He then adds two more illustrations that actually make the same point—and yet don't seem to have any connection to what He has just said:

Matthew 9:16-17 (NKJV)
16 No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and the tear is made worse. 17 Nor do they put new wine into old wineskins, or else the wineskins break, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But they put new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved."

Let's just focus on the first part of Jesus' illustration here—

"No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and the tear is made worse". (v.16)

The Greek word for **'garment'** could mean any garment—but specifically an outer garment like a cloak (coat) or even a robe.

In those days there weren't any synthetic fabrics so everything was made of natural fibers like wool, linen, or cotton—and of course, anything made from those would shrink when washed.

If a patch of new, unshrunk, cloth was sewn onto an old garment to fix a tear or hole—the first time the garment was washed, the new patch would shrink and pull away from the garment, making the tear or hole worse than before.

Jesus then follows that illustration with a second one—

"Nor do they put new wine into old wineskins, or else the wineskins break, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But they put new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved". (v.17)

Back then they would put their wine into animal skins, but as time passed the skins would become hard and brittle.

You didn't want to put new wine into an old wineskin because the new wine was still fermenting and therefore giving off gases that would expand the wineskin.

New wineskins were pliable and therefore able to handle the expansion—but old wineskins had become hard losing their elasticity.

They all knew that putting new wine into old wine skins would cause the old wine skins to expand and burst causing both the old skin and new wine to be lost.

Alright, those are the explanations of Jesus' illustrations—but what are the interpretations and most importantly <u>the application</u>?

In the illustration of **the bridegroom**—Jesus was likening Himself to the bridegroom at a wedding and His disciples to the bridegroom's friends or best men.

And why did Jesus liken Himself to a bridegroom—because He came to invite people to His wedding banquet which would take place in His coming Kingdom—where He and His Bride (the Church) would be officially married and live forever:

Matthew 22:2 (NKJV)
2 "The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son,

In fact, those who accepted His invitation would not be simply guests—they would become the bride themselves!

Entrance into the wedding banquet required accepting the invitation to be a member of the new covenant—a covenant that God promised He would someday bring to pass back in the OT through the prophet Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 31:31–33 (NKJV)
31 "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—32 not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. 33 But this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

The new covenant wasn't for Israel only (it was presented first to Israel because salvation is to the Jew first and *then* to the Gentile) but this new covenant would be for all who would receive Jesus as their Savior and Lord.

The Old Testament means *'old <u>covenant'</u>* and the New Testament means *'new <u>covenant</u>.'*

The old covenant was given to Israel through Moses on Mt. Sinai and was based on the Law—whereas the new covenant was based on grace and the blood of Christ which He shed on Calvary's Cross.

Galatians 3:10–14 (NLT)
10 But those who depend on the law to make them right with God are under his curse, for the Scriptures say, "Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the commands that are written in God's Book of the Law." 11 So it is clear that no one can be made right with God by trying to keep the law. For the Scriptures say, "It is through faith that a righteous person has life." 12 This way of faith is very different from the way of law, which says, "It is through obeying the law that a person has life." 13 But Christ has rescued us from the curse pronounced by the law. When he was hung on the cross, he took upon himself the curse for our wrongdoing. For it is

written in the Scriptures, "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree." [14] Through Christ Jesus, God has blessed the Gentiles with the same blessing he promised to Abraham, so that we who are believers might receive the promised Holy Spirit through faith. [Comment]

The Lord Jesus instituted the new covenant during the Passover meal the night before His crucifixion—

1 Corinthians 11:25 (NKJV)
[25] In the same manner *He* also *took* the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink *it,* in remembrance of Me."

But Jesus wanted us to be clear on this aspect of the new covenant—it wasn't going to be a *'makeover'* or a *'renovation'* of Judaism—this new covenant would be something brand new.

This is something He went on to teach through illustration—

Matthew 9:16–17 (NLT)
[16] "[no one] …would patch old clothing with new cloth? For the new patch would shrink and rip away from the old cloth, leaving an even bigger tear than before. [17] "And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. For the old skins would burst from the pressure, spilling the wine and ruining the skins. New wine is stored in new wineskins so that both are preserved."

In other words, the **'old wineskin'** of Judaism couldn't contain the **'new wine'** of the Spirit poured into the new covenant of Christianity.

The old covenant consisted of rules and rituals, of laws and ceremonies as a way for the Jewish people to atone for their sins and have fellowship with God.

But as the Book of Hebrews points out, the blood of animals could only temporarily cover their sin but not take them away—only the blood of the sinless 'Lamb of God', Jesus Christ could do that (John 1:29).

So, the old covenant was based on law, whereas the new covenant was based on grace made possible by the finished work of Jesus on Calvary's Cross.

The problem was that many Jews back then had a hard time transitioning from the old to the new and so they tried to combine the two into one religious system of law and grace, of works and faith.

But faith and works cannot coexist together in the same covenant—because either we are saved by the Law (works) or by God's grace (gift).

Although this is something that some Jews tried to do back then (Judaizers) and many still try to do today—combine law and grace together in a single system of religion as a way to be saved.

Those who adhere to this corrupt hybrid of works and grace tell us that we are saved by faith in Jesus plus—going to church, getting baptized, keeping sacraments, lighting candles, and praying the rosary—all of which, they tell us, are necessary for salvation.

However, as the Holy Spirit said through Paul concerning the Jews in his day, so to the Holy Spirit is saying about these people in the Church today, who are nothing more than modern day Judaizers—

Romans 10:3–4 (NKJV)
[3] For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. [4] For Christ *is* the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

In other words, any attempt to combine law and grace together as a way to be made right with God and get to heaven someday—is an abomination in the sight of God!

One author put it this way—
"A Judaistic Christianity which is a profession of grace and yet attempts to keep the law… is a greater abomination in the eyes of God than professing Israel in the past, worshipping idols".

J. Vernon McGee—
"Our Lord is saying this, "I haven't come to sew patches on an old garment. I have come to present a new garment, something which is altogether new." That new garment was the robe of righteousness which He gives to those who do nothing more than to trust Him. This was very

radical. John summed it up in his gospel when he said, "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17)".

But let me say it again, the problem with the new covenant replacing the old covenant—people don't give up their religious system so easily!

Luke 5:37–39 (NKJV)
[37] And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine will burst the wineskins and be spilled, and the wineskins will be ruined. [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.' "

The reason the religious leaders of Israel wanted to crucify Jesus was because they believed the old covenant of legalism was better than the new covenant of grace—why, because it allowed them to boast in themselves!

The new covenant doesn't permit that—

Ephesians 2:8-9 (NKJV)
[8] For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, [9] not of works, lest anyone should boast.

This desire to hold onto the old system of Judaism over the new covenant of Christianity led to simmering hatred toward Jesus on the part of the Scribes and Pharisees—that eventually boiled over in them having Jesus crucified.

This was the fulfillment of what Jesus said in Matthew 9:15—

Matthew 9:15 (NKJV)
[15] And Jesus said to them, "Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast.

Jesus was obviously referring to His crucifixion, which would take Him away from His disciples—those whom He referred to as **"the friends of the bridegroom."**

That would then be the time for mourning because then His disciples would go into the world preaching repentance (like the OT prophets including John the Baptist)—as Jesus said, ***"then they will fast as they call people to repentance."***

Once again, Jesus didn't come to pour the **'new wine'** of the Spirit (Christianity) into the **'old wineskins'** of Judaism.

Nor did He intend to put the **'new patch of Christianity'** on the old worn out **'garment of Judaism'**—Jesus came to do a new thing.

What about today—does God still want to do new things today?

Not a new, <u>new covenant</u>—but a new move of the Spirit within the context of the new covenant.

Pastor Chuck Smith—

"It's interesting and tragic how that throughout the history of the church, we see new movements being raised up constantly. Why? Because the old get hard and brittle. We begin to develop the traditions. And we get locked into traditions. And God wants to do a new work, but it doesn't fit into our traditions, we can't find that in our by-laws. It's amazing how we can get so structured and so traditional that there is no room left for a move of the Spirit.

So, throughout church history, we have found that whenever God wants to inaugurate a new work, He doesn't try to reform the old system but rather goes outside of it and begins something new. And as such, He creates a new skin for the new wine. And it, tragically, doesn't take very long to develop the rigid systems that preclude any fresh moving of the Spirit of God. And that's sad.

We see that here at Calvary Chapel, God just wanted to do a new work, and the old skins (of the established, organized church) *couldn't handle it. They couldn't handle a bunch of hippie kids with long hair, granny glasses and bellbottom jeans—so God raised up a 'new skin' where we could take these kids in and love them and teach them the Word of God and all. But let us beware lest we become rigid and no longer open to a fresh move of the Holy Spirit!"*

This December, the Calvary Chapel movement turns 60—and as such, the challenge for us now is not to be the alternative to the old wineskins of the Christian church but—not to become old wineskins ourselves!

Let me just say this—as long as literal wineskins back then remained full of wine, they remained flexible and therefore usable—but when they were emptied, they tended to become dry and therefore hard and unusable.

Just like our lives as Christians individually and the Church collectively.

As long as we, as the Church of Jesus Christ, stay filled with the 'wine' of the Holy Spirit (Eph.5:18) we remain flexible and usable—but if we allow ourselves to become empty and dry, we become hard and inflexible, set in our ways and unusable to God.

In an article entitled: *Is the time ripe for another Jesus Revolution*, pastor and evangelist Greg Laurie writes:

"The last great spiritual awakening in America was the Jesus movement, which took place over 50 years ago. I was there, and I think we can not only learn from history, but we can be inspired by history.

A few years earlier, an April 8, 1966, Time magazine cover posed this question: *'Is God Dead?'* What a difference a few years can make, especially when God intervenes. Five years later, a 1971 issue of Time described a spiritual awakening: *'Jesus is alive and well and living in the radiant spiritual fervor of a growing number of young Americans…If any one mark clearly identifies them, it is their total belief in an awesome, supernatural Jesus Christ, not just a marvelous man who lived 2,000 years ago, but a living God!'*

The words revival and awakening are often used interchangeably, but there is a distinction. An awakening takes place when God sovereignly pours out his Spirit and it impacts a culture. That is what happened during the Jesus Revolution, and it's what happened in multiple spiritual awakenings in the history of the United States, predating its establishment as a nation.

A revival, on the other hand, is what the church must experience. It's when the church comes back to life, when the church becomes what it was always meant to be. It's a return to passion. I think many times we overly mystify the idea of revival, but we don't really need to. Another word I could use for revival is restoration – restoring something to its original condition.

If I'm cruising down the road and see a cool, classic car that has been restored to showroom condition, I think, *'Wow, that's beautiful! Someone took time to do that.'* That can happen in a life as well—and it's what the church needs.

R.A. Torrey, a friend of Dwight L. Moody, was a great preacher and evangelist in his own right. He gave this prescription for revival during a February 1917 address at Moody Bible Institute:

'Let a few of God's people, they don't need to be many, get thoroughly right with God themselves (the rest will count for nothing unless you start right there); then let them band themselves together to pray for a revival until God opens the heavens and comes down. Then let

them put themselves at God's disposal to use them as He sees fit. That will bring a revival to any church, and to any community.'
Let's review: 1) Get right with God; 2) Get together with other Christians and pray for revival; and 3) Make yourself available to God, especially in winning souls.

Spiritual awakening, that outpouring of the Spirit, is up to God. We can't *organize* it, but we can *agonize* for it in prayer and call upon God to send it.
What are some signs of revival? One of them is that people are hungry for God's Word, the Bible. We don't worship the Bible; we worship the author of the Bible. The Bible is the autobiography of God, so as we read the Scriptures, we discover him.

I still have my Bible from those Jesus Revolution days. It was my first Bible, and it's all marked up. There are little handwritten notes in the margins, and tape is holding some of the pages together. I happen to like worn-out Bibles, because it's been said that *'a Bible that is falling apart is a good indication of a life that isn't.'*

Before there can be a revival in the church, there must first be a revival on an individual level. Revival starts with you. It starts with me. It starts with realizing that God wants to revive each of us personally.

➔ Share the quote from Gypsy Smith (1860-1947) about revival

Greg Laurie continues—

"Revivals don't last forever. They have a beginning, a middle and an end—and then we need another revival and then another one.

Someone once asked the evangelist Billy Sunday whether his revivals lasted. He replied, *'No, neither does a bath. But it's good to have one occasionally.'* It's good to ask God to revive us again and again. I know that I need constant revival. You do, too. We all do.

Looking back on the late 1960s and early 1970s, I see a lot of parallels between then and now. I've recently read a lot of interesting articles about this, which note the similarities. It was a divided nation back then. Things were very dark. But when things are very dark, God's light can shine brightly. I think we're due for another Jesus Revolution.

Here is what it comes down to: America needs a spiritual awakening. And the church needs a revival."