



The Ministry of the King in Matthew: And then they shall fast

October 14, 2018

Today's Text: Matthew 9:14-17

- Last week as we worked through Matthew 9:9-13, we were reminded that our LORD came to call sinners to repentance.
- We learned that Jesus noticed the hurting, the accused, and the sinner (like Matthew) and called them, even in the midst of their sin.
- His message was simple: “Follow me.” We noted that maybe our message should sometimes be simple as well.
- We also saw how immediate Levi’s response was and in his subsequent gratefulness, honored Jesus with a feast. May we honor the LORD with joyful worship as well!
- We marveled at Jesus’ desire to eat with “publicans and sinners” despite the criticism by “religious” leaders and were reminded that we too are called to “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.” (Mark 16:15)
- Finally, we were challenged by our LORD’s analogy of the physician and the sick, and His call to demonstrate mercy. We asked ourselves some questions: Do we really see sinners as sick and sin as sickness? Do we really see iniquity and transgression against God as spiritual disease? Is a lie a sin that results from sickness, or a tool to be used to one’s advantage? Is lust a sin that results from spiritual disease or is it love as one follows one’s heart? When you look over the culture do you see sickness and disease or do you see preferences and “live and let live?”
- We said, “Jesus’ mission was to call sinners to repentance; ours is the same! The message of repentance is perhaps the most needed message in our time. Every great revival happened when men’s hearts were pricked by the Holy Spirit due to their wickedness and sinfulness. Renewal and restoration broke out when they then turned back to God weeping and mourning. No true revival happens without repentance. People cannot come to Jesus unless they are broken. The obvious problem is this: we are in the process of rejecting the concept of God’s authority, including sin. So, “repent of what?” is a common question.”
- Our prayer was, “LORD, give us the loving strength to declare enough of your law that men’s hearts might see their sin and turn to you!”
- How appropriate that today’s verses are about fasting!

And then They shall Fast!

Mat 9:14 (KJV) *Then came to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not?*

1. The disciples of John (along with some Pharisees) approached Jesus with a question.
2. The “John” referred to here was John the Baptist, who preached repentance (“Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”) and was “The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.” (Matt 3:2-3) He may have already been in prison when these disciples came to Jesus (imprisoned for calling out the sin of Herod the tetrarch, Luke 3:19).
3. Apparently, some of his disciples followed Jesus and still held to a ritualistic view of fasting, much like the Pharisees did, hence the question.
4. Given the context, the previous feast at Matthew’s house might have caused the question. Essentially, “Here we are devoting specific times to fast and afflict ourselves, and you are at a party! What’s up with that?”

Mat 9:15 (KJV) *And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.*

1. Our LORD’s answer helps us understand a purpose of fasting: to mourn.
2. The implication is this: how can one mourn during a time of celebration? The metaphor given is of a wedding celebration. The Preacher’s Homiletical Commentary notes:

On the day of marriage the bridegroom went, adorned and anointed, to the house of the bride, attended by his companions (Jdg 14:11), and led her, attended by her maidens, in festive procession, with music and dancing, at even, by torchlight, into the house of his father. The marriage feast, which was defrayed by the bridegroom, lasted seven days.

3. William MacDonald makes the purpose of the illustration clear:

He (Jesus) was **the bridegroom** and His disciples the wedding guests. **As long as** He was **with them**, there was no reason to fast as a sign of mourning. But He would be taken **from them; then** His disciples would **fast**. He was taken from them—in death and burial, and since His ascension He has been bodily absent from His disciples. While Jesus’ words do not *command* fasting, they certainly *approve* it as an appropriate exercise for those who await the Bridegroom’s return.

4. I believe Christians should engage in times of fasting. The benefits are many. As we note almost yearly in January from Isaiah 58:6-12, Godly fasting:
 1. Helps loose the bands of wickedness—helps people emerge from evil!
 2. Undos heavy burdens and breaks yokes—helps the oppressed go free!
 3. Allows us to share our bread—to feed the hungry!
 4. Positions us to bring in the homeless—to be hospitable and serve others!
 5. Covers the naked—literally to clothe others and not hide from family and friends in need!
 6. Increases our light within the culture.
 7. Brings forth speedy healing!
 8. Helps us establish and put forward a righteous testimony! When our praying leads to good works, our lives match our words!
 9. Gives divine protection! When God's people move out in faith and serve, the glory of the Lord protects them from attack!
 10. Increases answered prayer! Why? Because this sort of fasting and ministry suggests a heart that prays according to the Lord's own heart...His will!
 11. Causes less bondage! True fasting means less yokes!
 12. Helps us control our tongues! True fasting produces less corrupting talk and more of that which builds up! (Eph 4:29)
 13. Promotes greater guidance, clarity, and strength from the Lord!
 14. Promotes the establishment of old, but godly patterns.
 15. Helps us fight for multigenerational restoration and reformation!
5. Having the power to call men to repentance and live a consecrated holy life requires fasting. There are some devils that we cannot defeat without it (Matt 17:21), and the discipline is necessary so after we have preached to others, we will not becomes castaways ourselves (1 Cor 9:27).

Mat 9:16 (KJV) *No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse.*

1. We get some sense here that the issue about fasting wasn't about fasting itself, but about keeping ceremonial laws, which governed the Pharisees and to an unknown extent, the disciples of John.
2. Our LORD, who was establishing a new Covenant of Grace, corrects such thinking via an illustration. MacDonald writes, "To try to mix law and grace would be like using a piece of new, unshrunk cloth to patch an old garment. When washed, the patch would shrink, ripping itself away from the old cloth. The disrepair would be worse than ever."

3. Now, this isn't to say the Moral Law has been abrogated by the New Covenant; it hasn't been. Adultery is still sin, as is lying, etc.
4. It is to say, however, that righteousness before God does not come from keeping ceremonies or rituals; it comes through faith in Jesus:
 - ***Gal 2:16 (KJV)*** *Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.*
 - ***Gal 3:10-12 (KJV)*** *For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. 11 But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith. 12 And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them.*
 - ***Gal 5:3-4 (KJV)*** *For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. 4 Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.*

Mat 9:17 (KJV) *Neither do men put new wine into old bottles: else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved.*

1. Our LORD continues His analogy.
2. New wine would still be fermenting. Fermentation is the chemical breakdown of a substance by bacteria, yeasts, or other microorganisms, typically involving effervescence and the giving off of heat.
3. According to a website on winemaking,¹ Fermentation requires two things : sugars and yeasts. A ripe organic grape is full of natural sugars and there are wild yeasts living on its skin. As soon as the skin of the grape is broken, fermentation can begin. To make wine, all the winemaker has to do is collect his grapes and gently crush them, releasing the sugary juice and exposing it to the yeasts. Fermentation will continue until all the sugar has been turned into alcohol or the level of alcohol in the juice reaches around fifteen percent, whichever is sooner. At around fifteen percent alcohol, the yeasts will die naturally and any left over sugars will remain in the wine.
4. New wine will continue to ferment, which would cause it to expand, bursting the old bottles or wineskins which have likely lost their elasticity.
5. Point: the New Covenant era would bring tension between it and the Old Covenant.
 - The blood of bulls and goats, which was typological but had no power to save, would be replaced by the blood of the Lamb of God.

¹ <http://www.morethanorganic.com/fermentation>

- The priesthood would be done away with because a perfect High Priest had come.
 - The old tabernacle would be replaced by the hope of a heavenly one (see Hebrews chapters 7-10).
 - Indeed, “In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.” Heb 8:13
6. Trying to put new wine in old wineskins would (and is!) a disaster.

Applications:

1. We should rejoice in the freedom we have been given in our perfect mediator and High Priest, and what He has done!
 - **Heb 9:11-12 (KJV)** *But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; 12 Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.*
 - **Heb 9:24-28 (KJV)** *For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: 25 Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; 26 For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. 27 And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: 28 So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.*
 - **Heb 10:1-4 (KJV)** *For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. 2 For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. 3 But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. 4 For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.*
 - **Heb 10:12-14 (KJV)** *But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; 13 From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. 14 For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.*
2. Christians should also realize that times of fasting can help us reset and bring ourselves under the power of the Holy Spirit again. The Gospel of grace also calls us to holiness:

- ***Heb 12:11-14 (KJV)*** Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. 12 Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; 13 And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed. 14 Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.
- ***1Pe 1:13-16 (KJV)*** Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; 14 As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: 15 But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; 16 Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.

3. Suggestions:

- Identify the “problem” areas in your life (lusts, spending, eating habits, thoughts, relationships, laziness, etc).
- Consider fasting in those areas periodically (i.e, 7 days, 21 days, or 40 days).
- Be accountable to someone for the increased discipline

Exhortations from our 2018 Fasting Guidelines:

Isaiah 58 declares God’s heart for permanent change through fasting...His heart for His people to be Holy...His heart for life to be qualitatively and quantitatively different as a result of time in His presence!

Prophesying during a period of great decline in Israel and Judah (about 740-700 B.C.), Isaiah preached to people who, by and large, would not listen. His message is filled with warnings, but also much beauty, as he prophesied not just to a restored Israel after an earthly captivity, but also the coming of the Messiah!

The goal for times of fasting is to allow God to truly change us (and our church)...to be healed from any unbiblical areas in our hearts. Consecration is about forming Godly habits from the INSIDE OUT...habits that will take us through the year in power and humility.

Let it be so LORD! Amen!