

MARK 2 : 18 – 22

LIFE IN CHRIST DOES NOT FIT WITH LIFE APART FROM CHRIST

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?”

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

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.

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.”

Some things just do not fit together—pouring fresh milk into another jug where the milk is already turning sour. Putting new curtains in a room where the windows and the room itself are filthy. Applying new paint over old paint which is already peeling and falling off. Some things just don't go together. That is also the point in our text from the Gospel of Mark—new life in Christ does not fit with an old life apart from Christ.

Mark's life history of Jesus very quickly gets to Jesus' work and preaching. He tells nothing of Jesus' birth. He starts with John the Baptist's preaching and baptizing; John baptizing Jesus, who—if you remember—was only six months younger; and Jesus going into the wilderness forty days to be tempted by Satan. By the fourteenth verse Mark is already telling us: “Jesus came to Galilee preaching the Gospel of the kingdom of God.” Mark has a remarkable account to tell, and by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he gets right to it. The message is of God's mercy and salvation (rescue) for us in Christ. It is a message very different from what the Jewish people had been taught—shall we say mis-taught—and different from what other world religions taught. Sin and guilt are not eradicated by man's toil and labor. Jesus is the One we need. In verse 15, Mark tells us that Jesus said “The time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God is at hand! Repent and believe the Gospel (the good news)! In other words, “Admit your sin and cling by faith to God's merciful good forgiveness in His Son.”

This message that He was the Savior from woe and every sin-behind-it was “good news”—astounding news:

**(1:22) When Jesus preached in the synagogue in Capernaum, the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, not as the scribes!”*

**(1:27-28) While Jesus drove out an unclean spirit—a demon—from a man, Then they were all amazed . . . and questioned among themselves, saying, “What is this? What new doctrine is this? For with authority He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him!”*

**(1:32-34) When Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law, They brought to Him all who were sick and those who were demon-possessed. And the whole city was gathered together at the door!*

**(2:5) When Jesus healed a man with dreaded leprosy, this man went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the matter, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter the city; . . . they came to Him from every direction.*

**(2:11) When Jesus announced to a crippled man that he was forgiven (which everyone who is sick longs to hear) and then also healed him, All were amazed and glorified God, saying, “We never saw anything like this!”*

This was new! This was different! This was fresh air! Forgiveness, love, and help from God for sinners—based on clinging to Christ, not one's own merit!

Such “new” things were hard to reconcile with the old. And so it is, just a few verses later, Mark in our text tells us, *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?” And Jesus said to them, “Can the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them?*

“To fast” means to go without food—not to eat. We call the first meal of the day “breakfast”—“break fast.” The body has fasted during the night, and in the morning we break that “fast.” At Jesus' time, most “fasting” was by custom, not by God's command. In the five books of Moses where all God's worship commands to Old Testament Israel were recorded, fasting is only mentioned one time. It is in connection with the great Day of Atonement, the one

day a year when the high priest entered the Most Holy Place to sprinkle blood on the Mercy Seat, the cover on the Ark of the Covenant, making atonement for the sins of the people (Leviticus 16). On that day “fasting” was required. Interestingly, the Hebrew word for “fasting” isn’t even used! rather the Hebrew expression “afflict your souls” (Leviticus 16:30-31). To go without food was not a physical “work” of itself by which people earned merit or favor before God. It was a spiritual exercise by which one afflicted the soul to remind self that needs for the body are not as important as needs for the sinful soul—righteousness before God. Genuine fasting stressed keeping those priorities straight. More fasts were added to the worship life of the Jews over the years. Some commemorated special days such as the sad day when the temple was destroyed by the Babylonians. Later, two regular fast days were part of every week. Such fasting was not wrong, if done rightly. However, fasting easily became a “self-merit” act—condemned by Jesus (Matthew 6:16-18).

In our text we assume that “right” fasting was intended. “Jesus, why do Your disciples not fast—not afflict their souls—like John’s disciples and the Pharisees do? Jesus in His answer doesn’t touch on wrong fasting. He simply stresses that some things do not fit together. It would be out of place to expect the friends of the groom to mourn at his wedding. A wedding day is a day of great rejoicing! Likewise Jesus and His astounding message of God’s mercy and pardon for sin was incompatible with struggling under the burden of sin. Jesus brings astounding news, joyous news, great news! Remember Mark’s words previous to our text—*they were astonished, they were amazed, they flocked to Him, “We have never seen anything like this.”* Jesus’ preaching, healing, power over the devil, and His forgiveness were the true fulfillment of God’s Old Testament worship rules pointing ahead to peace in Jesus! It was very fitting that Jesus’ disciples not fast. It would be as if someone were still trying to apologize for a wrong, when love and forgiveness had already been granted. Out of place. But Jesus does add, *The days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days.* The groom’s friends would indeed weep at a wedding if the groom were suddenly snatched off to prison or death. That day was coming for Jesus’ disciples when He would be arrested and crucified.

The old ways of waiting for the Savior cannot be blended together with the new days of the Savior’s arrival and rescue. It’s like sewing a patch of new fabric onto an old garment to mend a tear. If the new material is not pre-shrunk (most material in our day is), when it shrinks, it will pull away from the old and make the tear worse. It’s like children still waiting for Grandpa and Grandma to arrive, after they have already arrived. They will miss out on the joy of having them there and then will be doubly sad. The two don’t fit together.

It’s the same with trying to put new wine into old bottles—“wineskins” for them. If you have ever dabbled at making wine, you know that gas is given off in the fermentation process. When the wine is ready, it is still giving off a little gas and could pop a cap. In Bible times, glass bottles were not used, but leather bottles. Leather that is new still stretches and “gives”—perfect for shoes! or for bottles of new wine. Old leather bottles will not stretch and give. Under pressure from new wine, they will only crack and leak. Both the wine and the leather containers will be ruined.

The point? Trying to jam New Testament Christianity—which knows that Christ has come and saved—into Old Testament Christianity—which was keeping self in line waiting for His arrival—does not work. If we know that Christ died for our sins, but still keep sacrificing sheep, goats, and cows for our sins, we would have no assurance of anything, except total confusion about salvation. The two do not fit together. If we know the glorious fact that Jesus rose from the grave, but live gloomily as if He were still in the grave defeated, what’s the point of Christianity? Through Jesus, even the day of your own death is but the gate to heaven! You can go through life with the sure hope of God’s love, mercy, pardon, and His resurrection for you at the last day. Your joy! This may sound harsh, but So What? if you lose your house, or your cars, your savings, your health, your life, your wife, or your husband, or children, or parent? You and they have a far greater joy of holiness and happiness through Jesus. “And take they our life, goods fame, child, and wife; let these all be gone. They yet have nothing won, the Kingdom ours remaineth!” (A Mighty Fortress Is Our God). Today is Communion Sunday. In the Lord’s Supper you certainly have a very solemn experience, to know what it cost Christ to save you—His body and blood. But you have joy inexpressible, to know that you, yes you, are forgiven! God should give you a bigger smack than you could endure! but in tenderness of heart, and at the price of His Son, He gives you pardon, peace, and righteousness. Therefore, return to your seat from Communion today with a light and happy spirit in your heart, a sigh of peace, and even a smile on your face! Don’t just drag through the hymns, but sing from your heart, whether you are an on-tune singer or not! Finally, when you think of heaven, realize that the joys of heaven cannot be jammed into the framework of this earth. Just because there won’t be any hunting or fishing doesn’t mean it’s a sour place. It is beyond that! The new in Jesus far surpasses the old! Live with Christian joy!

Amen! So be it!

Pastor Kanzenbach--