

**Text: Luke 5.36-39**

This will be our last message in our fasting series.

When Rosemarie asked about it, I thought I might be able to give an answer in one or two messages. However, as I studied, I realized there was a whole lot more to the subject than I had expected.

More could be said, but I think, having arrived at message number 7, we will quit on a “perfect number.”

The subject is one that has a lot more said about it than the Bible seems to warrant, as perhaps you have seen. When you see all the books published on fasting, you would think there was more to it in the Bible, but it just isn’t there.

Today I want to really come to grips with what the church should think about fasting. Let’s review a few propositions we discovered along the way.

1. There is only ONE commanded fast in the Bible. (Corollary: there are no explicit commands to fast.)
2. As a matter of history, fasting is practiced worldwide, among many (not all) religions.
3. Pagans saw fasting as a way of manipulating their gods, Isaiah sternly rebuked that kind of fasting.
4. The Pharisees saw fasting as a way to show off their piety, Jesus sternly rebuked that kind of fasting.
5. There is a time when Christians cannot fast. (Do you remember what that is?)

When the bridegroom is present, the friends of the bridegroom cannot fast.

With that last one in mind, I’d like to go back to Luke 5 (there are parallels in Matthew and Mark).

Read Luke 5.33-39

**Proposition:** Jesus came to revolutionize religion which includes the way his disciples live out their spiritual lives.

**I. The presence of the bridegroom precludes fasting**

A. The metaphor parallels the experience of the disciples

1. At a wedding, no one is fasting

2. For the disciples, the presence of Jesus was enthralling
  - a. They couldn't get enough conversation with him
  - b. They couldn't turn away from following him
  - c. They had no need to spend time in private prayer and meditation (which tends to accompany fasting)
  - d. They had direct access to the Son of God (growing understanding)

## B. The metaphor doesn't prohibit fasting

1. Fasting is never *prohibited* in either the OT or NT
2. The Lord, instead, acknowledges that a time of fasting will come (but that time is not now)
3. When we first looked at the passage, I suggested that the three days Jesus was in the grave was such a time

When is the bridegroom absent from the church?

OT promises:

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Dt 31.6 "Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid or tremble at them, for the LORD your God is the one who goes with you. He will not fail you or forsake you."

Josh 1.5 "No man will *be able to* stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you."

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Appropriated to the church:

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Heb 13.5 *Make sure that* your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU,"

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In the church age, though fasting isn't prohibited, it's importance is reduced by the constant presence of the bridegroom.

## II. The purpose of the bridegroom is to revolutionize religion

### A. The Lord extends his teaching with parables

1. You don't tear out a patch from a new suit of clothes and sew it onto your old jeans (36)
2. You don't put new wine into old wineskins (37)

The point: wineskins are animal hides. Once used as wineskins, the fermenting wine will stretch the skins. A new batch of wine would put pressure on the stretched skins and cause them to break.

### B. The principle of new wine: New wine goes in new wineskins (38)

1. Jesus will later use wine to represent the New Covenant (Lk 22.20)
2. Just as the new wine would break the old wineskins, so the new covenant religion would break the old covenant Pharisaism
3. In other words, change is coming to the *methods* of religious practice
  - a. Whereas the Pharisees fasted twice a week, this old way will not fit the new way
  - b. Whereas Judaism was scrupulous about clean and unclean foods, this will not fit the new way
  - c. Whereas OT religion required much ritual and regulation, the new life in Christ will find liberty and a minimum of ritual

### C. The curiosity of preferring the Old (39)

1. This verse isn't meant to say "the old ways are better"
2. Rather, it says, those who are indoctrinated in the old find change hard

### A lengthy quote from Edersheim:

"In general, the two illustrations employed—that of the piece of undressed cloth (or, according to St. Luke, a piece torn from a new garment) sewed upon the rent of an old garment, and that of the new wine put into the old wine-skins—must not be too closely pressed in regard to their language. They seem chiefly to imply this: You ask, why do we fast often, but Thy disciples fast

not? You are mistaken in supposing that the old garment can be retained, and merely its rents made good by patching it with a piece of new cloth. Not to speak of the incongruity, the effect would only be to make the rent ultimately worse. The old garment will not bear mending with the 'undressed cloth.' Christ's was not merely a reformation: all things must become new. Or, again, take the other view of it—as the old garment cannot be patched from the new, so, on the other hand, can the new wine of the Kingdom not be confined in the old forms. It would burst those wine-skins. The spirit must, indeed, have its corresponding form of expression; but that form must be adapted, and correspond to it. Not the old with a little of the new to hold it together where it is rent; but the new, and that not in the old wine-skins, but in a form corresponding to the substance. Such are the two final principles—the one primarily addressed to the Pharisees, the other to the disciples of John, by which the illustrative teaching concerning the marriage-feast, with its bridal garment and wine of banquet, is carried far beyond the original question of the disciples of John, and receives an application to all time.”<sup>1</sup>

### III. The problem of the bridegroom's friends is they are slow on the uptake

A. In church history, as time went on, fasting became a more regular part of Christian discipline than in the apostolic age

“Some early Christians seem to have promoted fasting in ways similar to those of the more ascetic Jews. One evidence for this may be references to fasting that are in debated textual variants in the New Testament. Fasting is mentioned in later textual additions in Matthew 17:21; Mark 9:29; Acts 10:30; and 1 Corinthians 7:5.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. 1 (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1896), 665.

<sup>2</sup> Kent D. Berghuis, “A Biblical Perspective on Fasting,” ed. Roy B. Zuck, *Bibliotheca Sacra* : *Dallas Theological Seminary* 158, no. 629 (2001): 91.

Mt 17.21 *“But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.”*

Mk 9.29 And He said to them, “This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer.”

Ac 10.30 ¶ Cornelius said, “Four days ago to this hour, I was praying in my house during the ninth hour; and behold, a man stood before me in shining garments, [some mss. have “fasting” for praying]

1 Cor 7.5 Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. [some mss. have “fasting and prayer” for “prayer”]

“On the whole, unquestionably, the practice and teachings of the apostles and early Christians were in harmony with the example and teaching of the Master. But a tendency, partly innate, partly transmitted from Jewish legalism, and partly pagan, showed itself among their successors and gave rise to the *Vita Religiosa* and Dualism which found their fullest expression in Monasticism.”<sup>3</sup>

## B. The message of Jesus is that new ways accompany the new religion

“The main Lukan emphasis in this passage is eschatological. Jesus brought with him the ‘new’ (cf. Jer 31:31–33). God’s kingdom has been realized. The Anointed One has brought with him the fulfillment of the OT promises (Luke 4:18), and the joy of the awaited age has come. As a result there is no room for fasting or mourning. There would come a brief period (Good Friday to Easter Sunday) where such fasting would be appropriate. This, however, would pass quickly and then, even more than before, fasting would be inappropriate as the church lives in the joy of the resurrection and the exaltation of our Lord.

<sup>3</sup> Geo. B. Eager, “Abstinence,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. James Orr et al. (Chicago: The Howard-Severance Company, 1915), 26.

What fasting there will be has nothing to do with sorrow or mourning (cf. Acts 13:3; 14:23)."<sup>4</sup>

1. Stein points out there is a use for fasting (sending missionaries, appointing elders)
2. But we will add that these are exceptions in NT revelation, not the norm

### Conclusion:

**Proposition:** Jesus came to revolutionize religion which includes the way his disciples live out their spiritual lives.

There is some place for fasting, and I will reiterate that the Bible nowhere condemns it as such.

But the primary emphasis of the Bible, and especially the New Testament, is on a new way of living in the Spirit. Fasting is permissible but not required.

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<sup>4</sup> Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 186–87.