

**True Fasting**  
 Mark 2:18-22  
 August 10, 2025  
 Pastor Francis Bezzam

*<sup>18</sup> Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. And people came and said to him, "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" <sup>19</sup> And Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. <sup>20</sup> The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day. <sup>21</sup> No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the patch tears away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. <sup>22</sup> And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins—and the wine is destroyed, and so are the skins. But new wine is for fresh wineskins."*

Have you wondered why people take up fasting?

When we say fasting, the word in consideration in this passage is skipping a meal or not eating. People fast for all kinds of reasons. For health. For devotion. For peace. For protection.

The Bible has a lot to say about fasting.

Let me give you some general observations about fasting before we get into our passage.

The people of Israel were required to observe one day as a primary day of fasting. This day was called The Day of the Atonement also known as Yom Kippur. The day was characterized by mourning, fasting for 25 hours and repentance. Leviticus 16:29-30 and 23:27-32 are the prescriptive passages for the people of Israel.

*"Now on the tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. It shall be for you a time of holy convocation, and you shall afflict yourselves (or fast) and present a food offering to the LORD. <sup>28</sup> And you shall not do any work on that very day, for it is a Day of Atonement, to make atonement for you before the LORD your God..."* Leviticus 23:27-28.

The Day of Atonement was likely the only fast *required* by the people of Israel. All other fasting was voluntary. The people of Israel in the Old Testament fasted when they were to undertake a big task or when someone important in Israel had died in a war or when there was imminent threat from their enemies. Sometimes the fast was to repent for their sin. Here are few instances:

- In Judges 20:26, after Israel was defeated before Benjamin, the people fasted to

petition God for victory.

- In 1 Samuel 31:13, we see Israel fasting for seven days when the body of Saul was recovered.
- In 2 Samuel 12:16, we see David fasting the whole night when his child was ill.
- In 1 Kings 21:27, Ahab fasted when he heard from the prophet Elijah that disaster was going to come upon his household.
- In Esther 4:3, you see the Jews fasting when they hear about the decree that the whole Jewish people were going to be killed.
- In the book of Daniel, we see the Persian king Darius fasting (Daniel 6:18). We also see Daniel himself fasting and pleading with God on Israel's behalf (Daniel 9:3).

So, except for the official day of fasting, all other fasting was done to confess sins, to set aside a time for devotion to God or to seek God's favor.

Over time, fasting had become a sort of ceremony. So, from the Old Testament days to Jesus' time, fasting became a normal occurrence in religious life of Israel. The Pharisees fasted *twice* a week. (Luke 18:12). To them fasting was more of a sign of *outward* display of piety. The Pharisees would also put demands on people to go through such ceremony while they ignored the more noble matters of the law - of justice, mercy and faithfulness.

Jesus, however, knew about their heart condition. So, in the Gospel of Matthew, you see Jesus pronouncing seven woes on the Pharisees and one of the woes is the way their fasting was done - to be seen by others. "*They do all their deeds to be seen by others*". (Matthew 23:5)

Jesus does not find issue with fasting itself rather with the timing of the fast *and* the way the Pharisees or the religious leaders did it. How do we know that?

Matthew 6:16 "*And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but your Father who in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*"

Jesus fasted for forty days and forty nights before he began his public ministry.

In the New Testament, in the Gospel of Luke, we see Anna fasting day and night.

In Acts 13:2, we see the early Christians worshipping the Lord and fasting.

In Acts 14:23 we see the elders were appointed in every church with prayer and fasting.

The proper way to fast is to do it without it making it a spectacle.

Here, Jesus wants to show a clear difference between mere external display of piety and devotion and communion with God.

*And Jesus gives us some thoughtful teaching in his response to their question.*

Verse 18 begins with the background and question they ask Jesus.

*<sup>18</sup> Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. And people came and said to him, "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?"*

John's disciples are disciples of John the Baptist. And the Pharisees are the lay leaders of first century Israel. I wonder if their question to Jesus was to elicit an acknowledgement on how important fasting was. But Jesus knew their motive. They wanted to trap Jesus with their words. Jesus answers their question with a question. Verse 19.

*<sup>19</sup> And Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. <sup>20</sup> The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day.*

Jesus' answer is simple. When there is celebration, jubilation and excitement, there is no need for fasting. No need for a sad face or sorrow. Do you realize that something new has happened with the coming of Jesus Christ into this world? The Kingdom of God arrived in a new way that people really did not understand. The sick were being healed. Demons were being driven out. Lives were being transformed and people were experiencing the mighty things of God right before their eyes. Jesus' authority and kingship was touching every part of their life. When the paralytic was forgiven and healed, the people said, "We never saw anything like this!". Where ever Jesus went, it was like a wedding celebration.

In the summer of 2012, my family and I attended a nice wedding. The bridegroom, my wife's cousin, was the last son of a well-to-do businessman. So the father saw to it the wedding celebration was going to be a grand event. On the day of the wedding I woke up

in the morning to see there was a huge limousine parked outside the home. And I saw the groom dressed in his best heading to the church. There was the excitement and anticipation of the wedding in the air. There was no sign of unhappiness or sorrow or grief. We went to the church, attended the wedding ceremony and a grand feast was awaiting us. The bride and groom sat at the main table and a toast was raised with a glass of water.

Now imagine, right after the toast, the bridegroom announces “*Thank you all for coming. We are going to have just water for the wedding meal. And would you join me in fasting?*”. That would be just absurd. Even outrageous. No one fasts at a wedding! It was time for a celebration.

Jesus compares himself to the bridegroom. The word used for bridegroom here is *nymphios* – the masculine form of the word *nymph* – the English word for bride or virgin.

Jesus the Messiah, the Redeemer, the Savior of the world, the King has come into the world. Jesus’ coming into this world is a time of jubilation, of joy, of declaring with happiness and celebration that “the King is here, the Lord is here”. Fall down on your knees and worship Him with joy and laughter.

In Matthew 22:1-14, Jesus told the Pharisees a parable about the kingdom of heaven. “*And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying,*”<sup>2</sup> “*The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son,*”<sup>3</sup> “*and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come.*”<sup>4</sup> “*Again he sent other servants, saying, ‘Tell those who are invited, “See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast.”’*”<sup>5</sup> “*But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business,*”<sup>6</sup> “*while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them.*”<sup>7</sup> “*The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.*”<sup>8</sup> “*Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy.*”<sup>9</sup> “*Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.*”<sup>10</sup> “*And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests.*”<sup>11</sup> “*But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment.*”<sup>12</sup> “*And he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless.*”<sup>13</sup> “*Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’*”<sup>14</sup> “*For many are called, but few are chosen.*”

The only way to be part of God's kingdom is to have a "robe" of righteousness. Only Jesus gives that to you. Jesus takes your dirty rags of sin and gives you his perfect robe of righteousness.

In Revelation chapter 19, we see a picture of a great wedding feast awaiting God's people. *"<sup>7</sup> Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; <sup>8</sup> it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure"— for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb."*

Jesus is the Bridegroom and the Church is likened to his Bride.

Jesus wants his church to be pure and blameless.

Fasting has its purpose and exists for true communion with the Lord. Not external display.

So when Jesus was around, that was not the time for mourning, sadness, or lamenting. Because in verse 20, Jesus says the time to weep and wail will come for disciples. Lamenting will come, at least for three days when Jesus was crucified and killed. That will be the appropriate time to mourn for his early disciples. For believers today, for you, you look back and mourn for our sins by looking at the cross but we also rejoice by looking at his resurrection.

Jesus gives two simple illustrations or parables and to make his point.

Verse 21-22.

*<sup>21</sup> "No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. Otherwise, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse. <sup>22</sup> And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins."*

A new piece of cloth is incompatible with the old garment. A patch of unshrunk cloth that is sewn on a garment will shrink when washed and tear the garment. Jesus represents the New Covenant. New life exists, not by ceremonial law and regulations but by a relationship with God. The illustration of the new wine in old wineskins is similar. In

ancient times, wine was kept in pouches or sacks made out of animal skins. New wineskins were *soft* and *pliable* and would stretch when wine had not fermented yet. So when the new wine starts fermenting in the old wineskins, it would destroy both the wine and the wineskin. New wine requires new wineskins. Simple illustrations with great insight!

*This is what Jesus means:* Jesus Christ came to inaugurate the New Covenant.

- The Old Covenant was focused on ritual and regulation like fasting, circumcision and ceremonial laws. The New Covenant is focused on Christ. Jesus is all you need to get into heaven and have eternal life. (Hebrews 10:8-10).
- The Old Covenant was based on repeated sacrifices for sin. The New Covenant is focused on one sacrifice for sin – namely Jesus Christ. (Hebrews 10:11-14).
- The Old Covenant was inaugurated with tablets of stone. The New Covenant is mediated by Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit writing God's Law in tablets of the human heart. (2 Corinthians 3:3, Hebrews 8:10).
- The Old Covenant was temporary and obsolete. The New Covenant is new, better and everlasting. (Hebrews 8:13, 12:24).
- The Old Covenant was a ministry of sin and death. The New Covenant brings life and peace. The New Covenant is like a wedding celebration that never ends. (2 Corinthians 3:6-7, Romans 8:2, Hebrews 9:15).

*“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”* 2 Corinthians 5:17

How do you become part of this New Covenant?

How do you become part of Jesus' kingdom and join in the celebration?

You must receive a “wedding garment” of righteousness.

How?

Mourn for sin. Believe in Jesus Christ. His death for your sin. His resurrection as your righteousness.

Fasting is more than just skipping a meal or withholding yourself from the things of this world. True fasting is giving yourself to the service of others.

The prophet Isaiah makes this so abundantly clear in chapter 58. The people of Israel fasted but their hearts were not true to God.

<sup>3</sup> *‘Why have we fasted, and you see it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it?’ Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers.* <sup>4</sup> *Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to hit with a wicked fist. Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high.* <sup>5</sup> *Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a person to humble himself? Is it to bow down his head like a reed, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, and a day acceptable to the Lord?* <sup>6</sup> *“Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?”* <sup>7</sup> *Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?* <sup>8</sup> *Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.* <sup>9</sup> *Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, ‘Here I am.’* *If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness,* <sup>10</sup> *if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday.* Isaiah 58:3-10

God desires a fasting not as a ritual but as devotion and service to God.

----- Discipleship Questions-----

MESSAGE SUMMARY: True Fasting Mark 2:18-22

HEAD: These questions help you examine the truth of God's Word.

1. What do we learn about fasting as ritual versus true fasting for devotion to God?  
Why is this important to know in light of the New Covenant? Compare and contrast fasting in the Old and New Covenant.

HEART: These questions help you wrestle with what you believe.

2. How does the New Covenant help you understand the significance of fasting?
3. What is God convicting you of and to believe in light of this message?

HANDS/HABITS: These questions help you bring the truth into your everyday life and develop behaviors that change your habits.

4. For personal reflection: What will you change in light of your calling to Christ?