

Changed conditions with the Messiah present explained by four illustrations –

Luke 5:33-39; Matthew 9:14-17; Mark 2:18-22

5:33 And they said to Him, "The disciples of John often fast and offer prayers, the disciples of the Pharisees also do the same, but Yours eat and drink."

5:34 And Jesus said to them, "You cannot make the attendants of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them, can you?"

5:35 "But the days will come; and when the bridegroom is taken away from them, then they will fast in those days."

5:36 And He was also telling them a parable: "No one tears a piece of cloth from a new garment and puts it on an old garment; otherwise he will both tear the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old."

5:37 "And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled out, and the skins will be ruined."

5:38 "But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins."

5:39 "And no one, after drinking old wine wishes for new; for he says, 'The old is good enough.'"

Jesus and His disciples did not participate in the Jewish ascetic practices which were perceived to be the marks of spirituality by the religiously minded. This incident is tied closely to what preceded. In Luke 5:30, Luke points out that the Pharisees and their scribes began grumbling at Jesus' disciples saying, "Why do you eat and drink with the tax collectors and sinners?" In Luke 5:33, a direct challenge to Jesus' behavior is raised. Jesus' eating habits become the tip of the iceberg in the opposition to Jesus. In Luke 7:33-35, Jesus will say, "For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, 'He has a demon!' The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners! . . .'"

The OT law only required Jews to fast once a year on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29), but the Pharisees had established fasting as a regular practice. Twice a week, on Mondays and Thursdays, they would fast and pray for the nation (Bock, 508). John's disciples and the Pharisees must have been fasting on one of these observed, but voluntary, days of fast.

Both the Pharisees and the disciples of John the Baptist wondered why Jesus and His disciples did not follow this custom as most other pious Jews did. The issue appears to be one of perceived spirituality, for Luke says, "John's disciples often fast and pray, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours go on eating and drinking" (Lk. 5:33).

Jesus uses four illustrations to explain why it was not appropriate for His disciples to fast.

JESUS' FIRST ILLUSTRATION: The first illustration comes from a wedding. Jesus asks, "You cannot make the attendants of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them, can you? But the days will

come; and when the bridegroom is taken away from them, then they will fast in those days." (Luke 5:34-35)

It should be remembered that Jesus was addressing both the Pharisees *and* the disciples of John the Baptist (Matt. 9:14) who on an earlier occasion had said to his disciples that his relationship to Jesus was like that of the best man to the bridegroom: "He who has the bride is the bridegroom (= Jesus); but the friend of the bridegroom (=John the Baptist), who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. So this joy of mine has been made full. He must increase, but I must decrease" (Jn. 3:28-30). Thus, Jesus' illustration in Luke 5 is especially appropriate to the audience since John was the first to use the wedding analogy of Christ.

Although people fasted for numerous reasons, fasting was primarily associated with times of calamity and mourning. Jesus' point was that the historical situation demanded activities associated with celebration - joy and feasting, not mourning and fasting. Like John the Baptist, the disciples rejoiced because Jesus, the bridegroom, was with them.

The centrality of Christ within world history is a prominent idea. Different times require different behavior and one's behavior is dictated by where Jesus is. History focuses around Him. How men are to respond to God and the times in which they live is affected by Jesus' own coming. If Jesus is here, it is a time to celebrate, not fast. But when the time changes and the Bridegroom is taken away, then fasting would be appropriate.

There is also a deeper meaning to Jesus' illustration. In the OT, the bridegroom metaphor is often used by God in describing His relationship to Israel (Isa. 54:5; 62:4-5; Hos. 2:16-20). In Jesus' day, the Jews sometimes used it in connection with Messiah and the coming messianic banquet (Matt. 22:2; 25:1; II Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:123-32; Rev. 19:7, 9:21:2). Thus, through this illustration Jesus was alluding to who He was. He was Messiah, and the messianic age was drawing near.

JESUS' SECOND AND THIRD ILLUSTRATIONS: "No one tears a piece of cloth from a new garment and puts it on an old garment; otherwise he will both tear the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled out, and the skins will be ruined. But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins" (Luke 5:36-38).

If one were to sew an unshrunk piece of material onto an old garment to cover a hole, the new material would cause a greater rip as soon as it was washed and the material shrunk. The two dissimilar fabrics could not be put together – to do so would destroy both.

Likewise, new wine that was placed in old wineskins would result in disaster. In ancient times wine skins were made of animal hides that were tanned and then sewn back together with all the orifices sealed but one (usually the neck). Over time the leather became brittle. If new wine while in the process of fermentation, was put into a brittle wineskin, the gas released would cause the leather to expand and

burst. This, of course, would ruin both the wine and the wineskin. Instead, care was taken to put new wine in wineskins that were still pliable.

These two examples illustrate the same point; they show that the new situation introduced by Jesus could not be simply added to the Judaism that was already in existence. These two illustrations also answer the question as to why His disciples were not fasting, but they answer the question by introducing a deeper rationale for their behavior. "The newness Jesus brings cannot be reduced to or contained by traditions of Jewish piety. The messianic bridegroom has come" (Carson, 228). To patch Jesus' teaching into the Jewish thought of His day or attempt to pour it into the old system would be disastrous to both. Jesus was teaching something radically new and infinitely better.

"These parables bring unavoidable and radical implications for the entire structure of Jewish religion as its leaders then conceived it" (Carson, 228).

JESUS' FOURTH ILLUSTRATION: "And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for he says, 'The old is good.'" (Luke 5:39).

A man who drinks older wine enjoys its flavor so much and is so content with what he already has, that he doesn't even consider the new wine. In a similar way, those to whom Jesus was addressing were content with their old system (brought to light by their observance of the voluntary fasts of Judaism) so they would make no effort to try the new.

This last illustration follows from the fact that Jesus had just said that the new system He introduces cannot be added to the old Judaism. It points out the religious leaders' resistance to Jesus' ways. They had grown accustomed to the old. They had already set their course. Their tastes would not change. If they could not add the new to the old, as Jesus had said, then they would reject the new things introduced by Christ.

The religious Jews fasted twice a week because fasting felt spiritual; it agreed with their "taste" of what religion should be; when in reality, if they possessed true spirituality they would have recognized that God's appointed messiah was standing in front of them.

Controversy of disciples' picking grain on the Sabbath - Luke 6:1-5; Matthew 12:1-8; Mark 2:23-28

6:1 Now it happened that He was passing through some grainfields on a Sabbath; and His disciples were picking the heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands, and eating the grain.

6:2 But some of the Pharisees said, "Why do you do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?"

6:3 And Jesus answering them said, "Have you not even read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him,

6:4 how he entered the house of God, and took and ate the consecrated bread which is not lawful for any to eat except the priests alone, and gave it to his companions?"

Matthew 12:5-7 5 "Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and are innocent? 6 "But I say to you that something greater than the temple is here. 7 "But if you had known what this means, 'I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT A SACRIFICE,' you would not have condemned the innocent.

Mark 2:27 Jesus said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath."

Luke 6:5 And He was saying to them, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

Exodus 20:9-11 says:

"Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work. . . For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy."

The opposition against Jesus continues and the controversial Sabbath-rest issue only intensifies the Jews' hatred for Jesus who was perceived as a Sabbath breaker.

The Jews' rules for the Sabbath were extremely detailed, but it was admitted even by Jewish scholars that they were "mountains hanging by a hair," for the scriptural evidence was scanty though the rules were many (Carson, 279). "Picking" and "rubbing" the grain (Lk. 6:1) were, according to rabbinic tradition, one of the 39 forms of work that was forbidden on the Sabbath, for it was considered tantamount to reaping, threshing, winnowing, and preparing food (Thomas, Gundry, A Harmony of the Gospels, 60; MacArthur, Commentary on Matthew; 8-15, 281-283). The only exceptions to this were if the picking of the grain was for temple service or was done because one's life was at stake. Neither was the case here (Carson 280). Thus, Jesus and His disciples were labeled as Sabbath breakers.

When we add in the testimony of the other Gospels, Jesus' rebuttal to this accusation is fivefold:

1. *The example of David (Luke 6:3-4; Matt. 12:1-3)*
2. *The teaching of the law (Matt 12:5)*
3. *The prophetic anticipation of someone greater than the temple (Matt. 12:6)*
4. *The purpose of the Sabbath for man (Matt. 12:7; Mk. 2:27)*
5. *Messiah's lordship over the Sabbath (Luke 6:5; Matt. 12:8)*

1. The example of David (Luke 6:3-4; Matt. 12:1-3)

Luke 6:3-4: And Jesus answering them said, "Have you not even read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him, how he entered the house of God, and took and ate the consecrated bread which is not lawful for any to eat except the priests alone, and gave it to his companions?"

The story that Jesus is referring to is found in I Samuel 21:5-6, where David and his companions who were fleeing from Saul lied to a priest about their mission so that they could get something to eat. The only bread available was the bread in the tabernacle that was only to be eaten by the priests. However, 1 Samuel 21:3 suggests that although it was consecrated for the priests, it was not necessarily forbidden for others to eat it for the priest said to David that he could give it to him if his men were ceremonially clean. It is possible that this took place on the Sabbath since there is mention that the consecrated bread had just been changed (1 Sam. 21:5-6; Carson, 280). The story created a real dilemma for the Pharisees. David was the strongest king that Israel ever had. "He was the measure of others. To be a king like David came to be the highest accolade a successor could have" (Wood, A Survey of Israel's History, 26). But David, their greatly admired national hero, ate consecrated bread that was unlawful for him to eat; and what is important in the story is that he was never condemned for it.

What does this mean? How did such an illustration apply to Jesus and His disciples? The situation that David was in and the one Jesus was in were quite different. Jesus' disciples were not desperate and famished like David and his men were. It is not even clear that Jesus and His disciples were breaking the law since the OT comments on working on the Sabbath related to regular work. The disciples were not farmers trying to get in a little overtime, but were simply picking some grain from the field's perimeter, which the law permitted (Deut. 23:24-25).

The point that Jesus appears to be making was that the scripture did not condemn David's action, and if in David's case, the regulations of the law could be set aside due to human need, then the interpretation of law was not as rigid as the Pharisees made it. As Bock says, "Jesus advocates a restricted hierarchical ethic, and David's example is His defense: ceremonial restrictions of law are to give way to human need. . . There are situations in which the law can be waived or transcended. David and his men had such a moment. Such a situation faces the disciples" (Bock, 525). Therefore, Jesus was using the incident with David to question the Jews' approach to the law itself. Picking grain on the Sabbath was not a problem in God's eyes; the religious leaders with their legalistic interpretations were at fault.

2. The teaching of the law (Matt 12:5)

Matthew 12:5: Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and are innocent?

Jesus' second line of reasoning comes from the law. In performing their duties in the Temple, the priests had to change the bread (Lev. 24:8) and offer double sacrifices (Num. 28:9-10) on the Sabbath. If no work was to be done on the Sabbath, wouldn't the priests' "work" of changing the bread and offering sacrifice also be condemned? Yet it is clear that the OT law allowed the priests to do these things. The priests' work superseded the Sabbath law because temple responsibilities took precedence over the Sabbath. Therefore, it logically follows that if something greater than the temple were present, it would supersede Sabbath law as well.

3. The prophetic anticipation of someone greater than the temple (Matt. 12:6)

Matthew 12:6: *But I say to you that something greater than the temple is here.*

Something greater than the temple *was* present, and it, like the priests' duties on the Sabbath, took precedence over Sabbath law. That "something" is Messiah Himself.

Thus, Jesus' actions on the Sabbath are justified: His affairs take precedence over Sabbath law because He is greater than the Sabbath.

4. The purpose of the Sabbath for man (Matt. 12:7; Mk. 2:27)

Matthew 12:7: **But if you had known what this means, 'I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT A SACRIFICE,' (Hosea 6:6) you would not have condemned the innocent**

Mark 2:27: **Jesus said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath."**

Not only did the leaders fail to understand the scriptures and who it was who stood in their midst. They also had the same attitude as those in the days of Hosea (Hos. 6:6). They stuck with the law and ritual, but their hearts were far from God. They had missed the law's intent. The Sabbath law was to help man, not hinder and oppress him. The Jews had forgotten the compassion of God and created a system in which obeying a lot of rules was thought to please Him, though none of the rules adequately accomplished what God desired. If the Sabbath was a special day, then a faithful Jew would want to be especially careful to honor God and imitate His compassion by displaying compassion to others.

5. Messiah's lordship over the Sabbath (Luke 6:5; Matt. 12:8)

Luke 6:5: **And He was saying to them, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."**

Jesus not only claimed to be greater than God's temple, but also greater than God's Sabbath. As Lord of the Sabbath, Jesus has the right to act on the Sabbath any way He desires. He was the God whom the temple honored and the Sabbath served.