

Truth Response
September 25, 2016

We heard and believed the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ. We repented of our sins. We responded to this new information by changing our beliefs and our behavior. That process was not a one-time event. It is an ongoing process as we continue to learn new truth. This is the point Jesus speaks of in today's Bible passage. Let me illustrate with some Christmas movies.

Two popular movies at Christmas time are A Christmas Carol and It's A Wonderful Life. The main character in each of these movies learns some new information and makes changes to his attitude and behavior. One learns what his future will be like. The other learns how his life has made a positive difference in the lives of others. Both, on learning this new information, chooses to change his attitude towards something and change his behavior.

That is the main point of Jesus in our Bible passage this morning. **When Jesus teaches us new truth, He expects us to change in response to what we learn.** He may teach you something new about God, about yourself, about the world, about sin, or about salvation. When He does, He expects you to make changes in line with this new truth. Receiving new truth from God requires a change in you. We are in Mark's gospel this morning.

Mark 2:18-22 (NIV) Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. Some people came and asked Jesus, "How is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?"

Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them. But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast.

"No one sews a patch of un-shrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, he pours new wine into new wineskins."

Now, I know it sounds like Jesus did not answer the question. I will show that He did, in His own way. In the process we will learn about fasting.

First we need to know why Jesus was questioned about fasting at all. Jesus and His disciples were not acting normal. They were not behaving as good, Jewish men of that time were expected to behave. This occurred on a fasting day and they were not fasting. They were not behaving as expected.

They were not sinning by not fasting. **God only required the Jews to fast on one day of the year, the Day of Atonement.** However the Pharisees, a group of non-professional religious leaders of the first century fasted much more often than that. They had developed a collection of religious rules and practices that they added to God's commands. They considered their collection, called **the Tradition of the Elders (Mt 15:1-9)**, to be as important as **God's commands (the Law of Moses)**. And they tried to force their traditions on everyone else.

One of their traditions concerned fasting. They fasted, not once a year, but twice a week, on Mondays and Thursdays. It was a twelve hour fast, from six in the morning until six in the evening. We see this fasting practice referred to in Luke 18:9-12.

Luke 18:9-12 (NIV) Jesus told this parable: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men... I fast twice a week....'

I repeat, God did not require this much fasting. This weekly fasting was something the Pharisee's created and pushed on others. Evidently, the followers of John the Baptist observed the teachings of the Pharisees and were fasting.

The location of the Mark 2 passage was the home of a man named Levi, a tax collector. Evidently, this meal occurred on a Monday or a Thursday. That was why the ones asking the question knew that Jesus' disciples were not fasting.

Now Jesus is not opposed to fasting. He himself fasted for 40 days in the wilderness just before the start of His public ministry. He states in Mark 2 that His disciples will fast at some point in the future. However, when they choose to fast, He wants them to fast for the right reason and in the right way. He addresses this in His sermon on the mount.

Matthew 6:16-18 (NIV) "When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."

Jesus is saying, "Don't make a show of your fasting. Don't let others know you are fasting. If you are really doing it for God, then keep it between you and God."

You see, it was the Pharisee's practice to whiten their faces and dress disheveled on those two days, so when they went out in public people would notice their condition and say, "These holy, pious men are fasting." They did it for attention from other people. Jesus says not to be like them. If you are going to fast, then fast for the right reasons and in the right way.

Now, why might we choose to fast?

> Fast as a part of your repentance from sin.

The purpose of fasting on the Day of Atonement was to show sorrow for your sins. It was a demonstration of you recommitting your life to God. So when you sin, you might fast as a demonstration to God of your sorrow and repentance..

> Fast to spend more time praying. You might choose to deny your physical needs in preference for your spiritual needs.

> **Fast to increase your self-control.** In 1 Corinthians 6, Paul writes of not letting yourself be mastered by physical appetites or needs. You might choose to deny yourself food for a period of time to strengthen your self-control.

So there are good reasons for fasting. **Jesus is only opposed to fasting as the Pharisees practiced it.**

Let's look now at Jesus' answer to the original question. In the first part of His answer He used weddings to make His point.

Most weddings in our culture involve a ceremony followed by a reception. The reception usually lasts for two to six hours after the ceremony. But eventually it starts to wind up after the wedding couple leave for their honeymoon. Everyone else then heads home and get back to their normal life the next day.

In Jesus' day it was different. There was no honeymoon trip and the reception usually lasted about one week. Yes, there was one week of celebrating. You've heard of a staycation, where you stay at home on vacation instead of traveling to somewhere else. Their honeymoon was sort of a stay-honeymoon. And the guests all stayed to celebrate for about a week. That is how long the reception lasted. That was the custom of that day.

Now, how many of you have ever been to a wedding reception? And how many of you fasted at the reception? No one did. Of course not. We don't fast at weddings. Weddings are a time of celebration. It is a time of rejoicing with the newly married couple. It is not a time for fasting.

That is Jesus' point. They didn't fast at weddings either. Even a strict Pharisee, if invited to a wedding, would be free from the expectation of fasting during the week of the wedding.

Now here is the point Jesus is not clearly saying. **Jesus is saying that His presence in the world was like a wedding.** He is the groom in the illustration. The disciples are the wedding guests. While Jesus is with them, the disciples will not fast, but rather celebrate.

Jesus came announcing the imminent arrival of the Kingdom of God. God was about to reveal a lot of new truth about Jesus and expected His people to respond by changing their religious practices and behavior.

His two parables parallel each other. We'll take them one at a time.

Mark 2:21 (NIV) "No one sews a patch of un-shrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse."

If you had an old cotton shirt that had been washed about three dozen times, the fabric would have shrunk all it is going to. Now let's say you got a hole in the shirt and wanted to patch it with another piece of cloth. If you use a brand new piece of cotton cloth to fix the hole you will create a bigger hole in the shirt. Because as you wash the shirt, the patch of new fabric will shrink. And that will cause the edges of the patch to pull away

from the edges of the hole in the shirt, making an even bigger hole in the shirt than you started with.

Instead, you need to use a piece of old, pre-shrunk cloth to patch the hole. Then the old shirt will continue to be usable. Jesus' point is that new cloth and old shirts are not compatible with each other. You must fix an old shirt with an old patch. His stress is on the old. He makes the point again, for emphasis, with a different illustration.

Mark 2:22 (NIV) "And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, he pours new wine into new wineskins."

Wineskins were made of goats. They took a goat skin, usually in one piece, tied the legs closed, filled it with new wine, and closed up the neck hole. As the wine fermented, gasses were created which, like a balloon, would expand the skin, stretching it.

When the skin was emptied of wine you could put water or vinegar in it, or discard it altogether. But you wouldn't put new, unfermented wine in it, because this time, as the gasses pushed against the sides of the skin, there would be no more stretch left and the skin would burst, ruining the skin and spilling the wine on the ground. So, if you have new wine you have to get new wineskins to hold it.

Here Jesus puts the stress on the new. An old shirt needs an old cloth to patch it. Here he speaks of the new. New wine needs new wine skins to hold it.

The point Jesus is making with these two illustrations is that new spiritual truth requires a change in behavior. **The new wine and new cloth represent the Gospel, the good news of salvation in Jesus.** The gospel and the Law of Moses were not compatible. They did not fit together. Because of the Gospel, how people were to relate to God would change. If a person accepted the new spiritual truth of the Gospel, then that person had to change their way of relating to God.

Let me give you an example from our day. How many of you believe in Santa Clause? When you believe in Santa Clause there are certain things you do because of that belief. You hang stockings on the mantel, expecting Santa to fill them. You may set out a plate of cookies and a glass of milk as a snack for Santa. You might go visit Santa at a shopping center. If you believe in Santa you try to be good, at least near Christmas, because you believe he is keeping a list of who's naughty and who's nice.

But when learned the truth about Santa and stopped believing in him, you changed your behavior. You did not keep putting out the plate of cookies and the glass of milk. You quit visiting the buy in the mall. You learned new truth and you changed your behavior in response.

Jesus is speaking about the new truth of Himself and the Gospel and how God expects us to change our behavior because of it. When God revealed Himself to Moses and the Israelites 1,500 years earlier, He gave them new ways to live, what we call the Law of Moses, 613 commands for them to follow. These included moral laws, civil laws, and religious rituals. Living your faith in God through those laws was how you could earn righteousness before God.

But, **In Jesus, God revealed His plan of a gift of righteousness.** In this new truth there was no place for the old religious rituals. They did not fit with the Gospel.

In Jesus, God was revealing the new truth of the Gospel. The response of His followers to that new truth would require major changes in their thinking about the Law of Moses. It would require changes in their behavior. **The Gospel requires major changes in how we relate to God and other people.**

The new truth of the Gospel could not be lived out in the Law of Moses. It would not work together. They did not mesh.

For example, the Gospel made the Jewish temple obsolete. The temple system of worship was based on animal sacrifices. But Jesus, in dying on the cross, became the ultimate sacrifice. Jesus replaced the animals. They weren't needed anymore.

In addition, the temple was the place where the Jews were supposed to meet God. But followers of Jesus are indwelt with the Holy Spirit of God directly. We do not need to travel to a temple to meet with God. The temple of Yahweh has become obsolete.

What we have in Jesus is so different, that the old system won't work with it. Jesus is saying that the old system has to be let go of. This was really hard for the Jewish Christians in the first century. They had been raised on the old system. Their nation had been under the Law of Moses for 1,500 years. That is six times the age of America. That is a long time.

Now let's apply this to us. As you grow as a Christian, you will continue to discover new truth of God, of yourself, of the world, of the church, of sin, of your salvation. And when you do, God is expecting you to make changes in your beliefs and behavior. YOU have to change because of what God is teaching you.

The Gospel is not just accepting Jesus as your Savior. You must also accept Him as your Lord, turning your life over to Him. Accepting the truth of the Gospel must be more than an idea you accept in your mind. It must be lived out in obedience to Jesus with your whole self, your mind, heart, strength, body, possessions, future, etc.

This Gospel may be new to you. You may never have heard it before. Or maybe, today, you finally understand it. The correct response, with your belief, is to turn away from your sins, turn your life over to Jesus as your Lord and begin living in obedience to Him.