

Scripture: Mark 2:18-22

The Feast Has Begun!

Beloved in Christ, the binding or tying up of Satan begins with Jesus casting out the unclean spirit from a man in Mark 1. And now in Mark 2, the feasting begins. Any king who conquers, enjoys a feast! And Jesus is the King of kings, who conquers sin, death and hell, Satan Himself. All that culminates at the cross.

Yet as we see, the conflict continues to intensify as Satan fights back through Christ's opponents. They don't like Jesus eating with tax collectors and sinners [Mark 2:13-17]. But Jesus, the Son of God, is the Physician. He can forgive sins, therefore, He can eat with sinners. No need to hide sin; He heals!

Here in Mark 2:18-22, Jesus, again claims a special title for Himself: this time the Bridegroom. He is the Bridegroom and the only reasonable response is celebration. He is the reason for feasting! Again, there is conflict. His opponents want to hold on to the old ways of fasting, the old religion. Yet, In Him, the Feast Has Begun for His bride. This is because

1. Christ has come [vv.18-19]
2. [Yet] Christ's coming brings conflict [vv.20-22]

1. Christ has come

Now comes the question of fasting. We read in **verse 18** that *"the disciples of John and of the Pharisees were fasting."* Perhaps they were fasting at the time Jesus and His disciples were feasting in Levi's home. We read, *"Then they came and said to Him [Jesus], 'Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?'"*

There are two groups fasting: John the Baptist's disciples and those who belong to the Pharisees [strict Jews]. John's disciples were likely asking from sincere, honest hearts, whereas the Pharisees were asking from critical, hate-filled hearts.

Why this difference? First, remember John the Baptist was preaching a baptism of repentance. He was preparing for the coming of the Messiah. Moreover, as we heard in Mark 1:14, John was now in prison. So his disciples are fasting. The Pharisees on the other hand were out 'to get' Jesus by finding fault. Many were fasting two times a week [Luke 18:12], and not fasting for the right reasons: they wanted to be seen by men [Matthew 6:16ff].

Second, if you read **verse 18** carefully, we read, *"then they came and said to Him..."* Who are the 'they'? Was it both groups? From Matthew 9:14 we read that the disciples of John came to Jesus asking this question. They had the courtesy to ask Jesus directly!

Jesus is not against fasting. He assumes one may fast in Matthew 6:16, *"When you fast..."* But here Jesus is encouraging feasting because He has come. And those fasting failed to notice Him! That's the point. They failed to see Him, His glory! Jesus says in verse 19, *"Can the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them?"* The obvious answer is 'no'. *"As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast"*.

A wedding celebration in a Jewish village normally lasted seven days! Friends and guests had no responsibility but to enjoy the festivities. There was an abundance of food, wine as well as song and dance in the house and on the street. Any thought of fasting at such a moment was out of the question.

Now Jesus compares His presence on earth with a wedding feast. Again Jesus puts Himself forward so that they can't miss Him! He is the focus! He compares Himself to whom? The bridegroom. Who are the friends of the bridegroom? His disciples.

The Pharisees were trapped in their own rituals, depending on their good works to climb to God. They wanted to hang on to that. But here God is, in the Person of His Son, standing before them offering Himself, the feast! They are not ready to receive Jesus. Their hearts are hard like the old wineskins. They had the Old Testament Scriptures. Again and again the Bible compares the relationship between the Lord and His people, Christ and His church, like the bond of love between the bride and bridegroom.

Already through the prophet Isaiah, God assures His sinful people of salvation, *"For as a young man marries a virgin, so shall your sons marry you; and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you."* [Isaiah 62:5]. He will wed Himself to them! This is something to rejoice about! In Isaiah 5, God even sings a song to His beloved [v.1].

Through the prophet Ezekiel, the Lord reminds His people of His love and grace, *"And when I passed by you and saw you struggling in your own blood, I said to you in your blood, 'Live!' Yes, I said to you in your blood, 'Live!' I made you thrive like a plant in the field; and you grew, matured, and became very beautiful. Your breasts were formed, your hair grew, but you were naked and bare. When I passed by you again and looked upon you, indeed your time was the time of love; so I spread My wing over you and covered your nakedness. Yes, I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you, and you became Mine," says the Lord God.* [Ezekiel 16:6-8]

Even John's disciples should remember John the Baptist's words about Jesus, *"He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled. He must increase; I must decrease"* [John 3:29-30]

Now God has come in His Son, Jesus, to wed His sin-filled bride, restoring her beauty. Jesus describes His mission as a wedding: He liberates the demon-possessed; He brings healing to the sick; He cleanses the leper; He forgives and heals a paralytic. He saves those lost in sin.

It's no time for sadness. It's no time for fasting. It's not a time for abstaining from food! It's a time for feasting! How can His disciples mourn while words of life and beauty are falling from His lips? It doesn't make sense. His disciples have Him. They have everything! Jesus is clear: *"as long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast."*

If only the disciples of John and of the Pharisees would grasp by faith the glory of Jesus, His Person; they, too, will understand why they are to feast rather than fast. By not joining the feast, they show they are not accepting the Messiah. So many people want to hold to the old [whether religion, culture, traditions]. It gives them a sense of security but it's ultimately false security. They reject a relationship with God through Jesus because they want to hold on to what they have!

But how do we understand the words of verse 20? This brings us to our second point. Christ has come as Bridegroom, and yet

2. His coming brings conflict [vv.20-22]

We read in **verse 20**, *"But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days."* The picture suddenly changes here. It's abrupt; rather, dismaying. *"The bridegroom will be taken away"*

In a normal wedding, it is the guests who finally leave and the bridegroom and bride begin their life together. But Jesus changes the image here. In this verse, the groom is being forcibly removed from the wedding celebration. What could Jesus be referring to?

Jesus is fully aware of the hatred and malice in the hearts of His opponents – rejecting the feast of salvation He offers! The conflict is intensifying against Him. In His words, we hear an early prediction of His death on the cross. He speaks of the day when He will be taken away from His disciples, arrested, put on trial, and sentenced to death by the authorities. He will be hung on the cross! Then His disciples will fast. Then they will have days of mourning.

Brothers and sisters, we soon celebrate Good Friday. On that day, Christ, our Bridegroom, gave His life on the cross for the sins of His people. This is why it is called "Good Friday." Jesus, in Mark 2:20, echoes the words of Isaiah 53:8, *"By oppression and judgment He was taken away. . . For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of My people He was punished."* Taken away; totally cut off.

Yet here is the joy! Because of Christ's sacrifice for sin, there is a feast, a celebration of His salvation for us! This was the price He paid to purchase and redeem His bride, for all who trust on Him! We remember and we eat! We eat with Him, our resurrected Savior at His table. This is a victory meal, bread and wine, for sinners, the promise of forgiveness and resurrection to new life! This is His body and blood for all who believe!

You see, the mourning of His disciples did not last many days. Jesus, on the night before He was crucified spoke with His disciples saying, *"Most assuredly, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy. . . . therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you"*[John 16:20]. Here Jesus is promising to rise from the dead! Satan is conquered; there is feasting!

This joy, the salvation Christ offers, is totally different from what the world or religions today offer. It's the difference between feasting and fasting, between being full and staying empty. It is all of Christ and only Christ or it is none of Christ. You can't fit the 'new' together with the 'old.' Let's make it simple: Christ, for example, can't be added to Islam or Hinduism.

Jesus illustrates this point by giving two brief parables. In the first parable, Jesus says in **verse 21**: no one takes a new patch of cloth and sews it on an old garment. What happens to the new patch when you wash it? The new patch dries and shrinks and will be pulled away from the old and a worse tear results! The patch which is supposed to solve the problem creates a bigger problem!

Jesus reinforces His first parable with a second in verse 22. No one puts new wine into old wineskins. If you fill old wineskins with new wine that ferments and expands, what happens to the old wineskins? They burst and the wine is spilled.

Jesus shows the clash of combining the old with the new. Jesus' point is in the last line of **verse 20** "*But new wine must be put into new wineskins.*" Hear that? New; only new!

What is Jesus saying here? Jesus is saying that the salvation which He is bringing is out of line with joyless fastings. It doesn't fit. You can't put the two together. It makes it far worse. The new covenant He brings is far greater, far superior, far richer than the old covenant. It surpasses the old. It's all fulfilled in Jesus!

Jesus is the new patch, the new wine. He's not just an attachment, an addition or an appendix to daily life. He is life and He is all of life! He makes our hearts new by His Holy Spirit, enabling us to believe! In the new covenant, you don't add Jesus to your schedule, your family life or your business. He radically changes all of it.

He radically changes the way you do business, the way you raise your children, the way you treat your wife or husband, the way you spend your free time. The new wine Jesus is and gives is poured into fresh, strong wineskins of a life of gratitude, freedom and service to the glory of God.

Our joy in Jesus clashes with the values of our society which rejects Jesus and His Word. This explains why His coming into our lives by His Holy Spirit also brings conflict with the old – the old in us and in the world. This is why Christians are persecuted. Jesus said, "As they hated Me, they will hate you." The world despises us for our stand in Jesus – what He says about gender, about marriage, about raising children.

This is also why we need to be strengthened spiritually with the Word but also with the food at His table – the bread and wine. We need to be spiritually strengthened to persevere and remain faithful and true to Christ. He is the real. He is the new.

The victory over sin, death and Satan, has been won in Christ. In Him, the feast has begun. We look forward and await the fullness of the glory which is ours at Jesus' second coming. As the Scripture says "*Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife [church] has made herself ready . . . Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb*" [Revelation 19:7,9]. Amen!