

# Matthew 9:14–17

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[ 0 : 00 ] Matthew 9, 14 through 17. Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?

And Jesus said to them, Can the wedding guest mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast. No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch tears away from the garment, and a worse tear is made.

Neither is new wine put into old wineskins. If it is, the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and the skins are destroyed. But new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Well, good morning.

[ 1 : 10 ] I want to have my special welcome to you, especially those of you who are visiting. We're so glad that you've come. Every week we spend the centerpiece of our time reading God's word, and then understanding it, that our lives might be shaped by it.

And so today we've arrived here in Matthew chapter 9. I want to start this way. Time eventually runs out on traditions.

Old ways are often forced to give way to new days. Time runs out. Traditions change.

New things are brought forth. And yet, in every generation, there are some ardent, well-meaning traditionalists among us, holdouts who would question the wisdom of setting some time-honored practices aside.

In the world of musical theater, there's no better example of this one who is reluctant for change than the father of the family on Fiddler on the Roof.

[ 2 : 38 ] You probably know how to pronounce his name. I'm not sure I do. Tevye, or something of the sort. He sings a song called Traditions.

And the opening verse goes like this. Because of our traditions, we've kept our balance for many, many years. Here, we have traditions for everything.

How to eat, how to sleep, how even to wear clothes. For instance, we always keep our heads covered and always wear a little prayer shawl. This shows our constant devotion to God.

Everyone knows who he is and what God expects him to do. Can you see him? As he puts his garment on?

As he covers his head? As he has his prayer shawl? This is a man ready-made to do what he believes God expects him to do.

[ 3 : 42 ] Earnest prayers constantly made. He's relating to God in a very prescribed, tightly defined way. There's a routine.

Religious traditions are beautiful for their rhythm and their routine. He follows the rules. And yet this one, in musical theater, was not yet ready for change.

And if you can see him, you've got a pretty good picture of the group of people that open our text here in chapter 9, verse 14. Can I introduce you to these ardent, religionists, earnest seekers after God for whom time is running out on tradition?

Matthew records, then the disciples of John came to him. That is Jesus. Saying, why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?

If you're not familiar with John, this is a reference to John the Baptist. John the Baptist was introduced to the reader back in chapter 3. He preceded Jesus.

[ 4 : 57 ] He made a way for him. He actually baptized him. He gave way in his ministry to him. John the Baptist was a religious follower after God that brought a whole country into a state of revival.

Prepare the way for the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent. And all of this is taking place.

Repentance, prayer shawls, headdress, sackcloth, ashes.

That's who we meet there in verse 14. Well-meaning, religionists, doing what we would expect of them, doing what the traditions demanded.

Particularly, in this text, fasting. I don't know if you know much about fasting. It's going without food for a concerted length of time.

In the scriptures, it was normally done in times of mourning. Grief. In fact, we'll see next week in our text a story where professional mourners are attending a funeral.

[ 6 : 12 ] They're praying. They're weeping. They're fasting. They're going without food. They would wear a head cloth and cover their head with ashes.

And the Old Testament, while it regulated traditions like fasting to one time a year, by the time these guys are on the scene, well, they're doing it twice a week.

Because you know, if it's good to do it once a year, it's good to do it twice a week. And so, if you love God and you want to not be out of sorts with God, well then, if he wants you doing something annually, he's certainly going to be happy with you if you do it twice come Sunday.

Amen. They were keeping themselves in good with God. And that's where the problem came in. That group now sees Jesus and his followers.

John, the major voice of the generation, is falling silent. John's ways of repentance and readiness are being laid down and Jesus arrives eating, drinking, fellowshiping with a smile on his face, prayer shawl abandoned, no headdress of ashes or mourning.

[ 7 : 28 ] And so, this incongruent picture of how one relates to God is put forward. That's why they asked the question.

There it is. You can see it for yourself. Why do we and the Pharisees fast but your disciples do not fast? We think God matters.

And we thought you did too. Well, Jesus' answer will let you know this and this is what I want you to see this morning.

Following Jesus places you in a new relationship, not in the practices of an old religion. I think there's something there.

Following Jesus places you into the primacy of relationship, not religion. Jesus, then, if you're exploring Christianity and today have found yourself here, you might be glad to know that he's not about religion.

[ 8 : 38 ] religion. He's not about the traditional means by which one relates to God. Jesus is going to introduce an idea that it's not simply about following rules and therefore being accepted or right with God.

You don't need to do all those things to be well with God. The word picture of verse 15, take a look at it, proves for us that getting on well with God is going to be about a relationship, not religious practice.

He's going to introduce not what they're on about, but who a bridegroom and wedding guests are in relationship to. The word picture of verse 15, and we'll see it, is going to tell you that for Jesus, it's all about your relationship, not your religion.

Secondly, there's going to be two illustrations. You can see them there, 16 and beyond, and they are going to confirm that the old ways of relating to God have given way to a new day with the arrival of Jesus.

So let's take a look. The word picture of 15. I just kind of put by my thoughts here, relationship is everything. Why do your disciples not fast?

[ 10 : 06 ] Relationship is everything. Jesus said to them, can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.

I find Jesus' choice of a bridegroom and wedding guests to be a fascinating way of responding. Not only fascinating, but intriguing.

It's fascinating that he takes a question on what they're not doing and turns it into a discussion on who his followers are likened to, namely the wedding guests who have arrived for the joyous ceremony of the wedding in which in him, Jesus, we now have the bridegroom.

He says, when the bridegroom's here, wedding guests don't fast. They will when he's not here. The whole parallel of the illustration is, according to Jesus, I'm a bridegroom.

Who goes to a wedding with sackcloth and ashes? Who goes without food? Pastor Ney would certainly resonate with this.

[ 11 : 27 ] How can one celebrate without food? Why would one be in mourning and in grieving at a wedding? You know, I've had a few of my kids married, but my oldest daughter, we were able to host her wedding.

It was a great thing because as a pastor, you're always officiating weddings and you're never really hosting them, but we got a kick out of hosting a wedding. We threw a party.

We were at the South Shore Cultural Center where President Obama had his thing going on with Michelle on their wedding day. I watched my girl get married and we went in from one room to another and we celebrated and there was a dance that took place.

Yes, you'll have to find it on video from someone that knows me way back. Even I was dancing on the day of my daughter's wedding. There was food to be eaten, drinks to be had, celebration, joy. Jesus says, why are my guys not fasting? Why are they not mourning? Why are they not grieving? Have you not seen? I'm a bridegroom.

[ 12 : 40 ] These are wedding guests. In other words, it's just simple common sense word picture. It's not the time for that.

That's what he says. It's not the time for it. There will be a time for it. I think he's referring to the days of his crucifixion, to his death, which they went two and a half, three days without seeing him. Although it is intriguing when he shows up, first thing he does for them is make a meal. He's back to it's food time now. And this moment in time where they were considering his absence, well they fasted then, but you don't fast in the presence of a bridegroom.

It's just all wrong. This is what makes some of these romantic comedies work when the bride is coming on her wedding day and for some reason the wedding doesn't actually take place.

It's like you know everything is wrong with this script. That's what Jesus is saying. But notice he sees himself as a bridegroom.

[ 14 : 00 ] So it's fascinating. Following Jesus is about relationship, not religion. He even answers in the terms of relationship. A bridegroom to the wedding guests. But it's intriguing. Have you ever wondered why does he choose this word picture?

I did this week. Why a bridegroom and wedding guests? Does he just pull this out of thin air? Could he have used anything? Why does he use this? And why does he use it with John's disciples? Well, it's fascinating to see that the verse before, the one we closed with last time we were in Matthew together, was through a quotation in Hosea.

If you don't know anything about Hosea, all you need to know this morning is the whole book of Hosea is a prophetic Old Testament piece of literature that is written under the rubric of God as a bridegroom.

and Israel as the adulterous nation. And it's God continually saying, I'm the bridegroom, marry me.

[ 15 : 06 ] Perhaps, perhaps he uses bridegroom and wedding guests because he's just referenced the prophetic book, the prophetic book that demonstrates God as a coming bridegroom.

But that would be interesting then because perhaps Jesus is indicating himself to be like Yahweh of the Old Testament. That God is bridegroom now he claims bridegroom.

And he does this for John's disciples. If you don't know anything about John the Baptist, know this. He launches his ministry out of an ancient text in Isaiah which talks about comforting God's people.

The time of mourning was over. The time grieving is done. The time of sackcloth and ashes is ended. And John comes announcing comfort to the people that God is arriving for the people.

John's disciples would have known all of this. I looked back this week into the book of Isaiah and thought perhaps Jesus uses this word picture because John's disciples would have known what they expected to follow on the heels of his ministry.

[ 16 : 30 ] Can I read a couple of verses to you? You don't need to find them. But in words of Isaiah which would have been familiar particularly to John's disciples, it says that on the day God would come to comfort quote, he would grant to those who mourn in Zion to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes.

That's like the opposite of fasting. He says he would give them the oil of gladness instead of mourning. And then even with the following illustrations Isaiah prophesied that he would come with a garment of praise instead of a faint spirit.

I mean those word pictures are stunning. He'll go on in Isaiah and say I will greatly rejoice in the Lord. My soul will exalt in my God for he has clothed me in the garments of salvation.

He's covered me with a robe of righteousness. And then he says as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress as a bride adorns herself with her jewels for as the earth will bring forth all of its sprouts!

cause righteousness and praise to spring up from the sprouts! And then he says as a young man marries a woman so shall your sons marry you and as a bridegroom rejoices over the bride so your God will rejoice over you!

[ 17 : 59 ] This is Isaiah picturing God in terms of the bridegroom the garments in regard to righteousness the oil of gladness Well I don't know if bridegroom and wedding guests would have been interpreted by you or me in that way but John's disciples John's who left everything they had to follow the one who was preparing the way for a king John's disciples who were religiously earnest and wanting to do the right thing John's disciples that were repenting knowing that the kingdom of God was at hand and Jesus says if you want to know why my guys aren't fasting it's because that day that you have longed for is now here in other words he says it's about relationship he's basically saying do you want to come and be part of the wedding guests because I

Jesus am now receiving that which the Old Testament forwarded and spoke about in regard to God himself this is nothing new for Matthew it came out of Matthew's opening line in Matthew 1 the gospel of Jesus Christ the son of David the son of Abraham from the very beginning Matthew tried to tell you I've got something I want to argue here I want to argue that Jesus is a big deal because he fulfills!

all the promises that are meant through Abraham to go to all the people Jesus is a big deal because he's the son of David who rules over all people and now we're hearing not through Matthew's voice but through Jesus' voice interacting with John's disciple I am the bridegroom I am God come for the wedding are you rightly related to me relationship is for Jesus everything I hope that's an encouragement to you some of you have been considering what do I need to do to connect with God some of you entering into church week by week wondering asking what is required of me what is expected of me and I'm telling you it's not like fiddler on the roof it's not it's not get into the established religious traditions so that you will do what's expected of you and God will look rightly upon you no it's basically look to

God this morning and say can I be a wedding guest at this celebration I hope for some that just thrills your heart getting on well with God will be about your relationship to Jesus not your religious practices and if that one word picture isn't enough just look what Jesus does he must have thought that John's disciples were you know maybe they were on athletic scholarships like I had always hoped to be like for many of you you probably think verse 15 is all you need but for for guys that are a little slower on the uptake we need a couple of illustrations and he just adds to the word picture two illustrations doesn't he he's just reinforcing that it's not only about relationship but he wants you to know religious traditions don't get it done look at him there he says no one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment for the patch tears away the garment and a worse tear is made neither is new wine put into old wine skins but the new wine is put into fresh wine skins and so both are preserved two illustrations confirming that the old ways of relating to God have given way to a new day with him put it put let me put it like this the practices of the old religion are now obsolete garment wine skin this is common sense stuff a garment is that which covers us when I was in grad school on the east coast in

Boston we lived above an elderly couple over their two car garage 20 by 24 footprint barely had a kitchen didn't have an oven because it wasn't large enough to be able to open an oven door but for four years we loved that little apartment over their garage this aging couple had lived all the way back in the roaring 20s in fact the man had flown in the spirit of St.

[ 23 : 08 ] Louis with Lindbergh they had a couple of old raccoon coats you know the kind you'd see in photos from the roaring 20s his was big and fell all the way down to about my calves and the pockets were lined with raccoon tails I hope I'm not upsetting anyone here at least it was a raccoon not a mink but at any rate they were raccoon coats and my wife's coat was shorter waist length and lighter and they gave those coats to us these garments of old and we put them on and you could just almost feel like you were screaming down in some old roadster into you know watch the Harvard Yale football game you know late fall or something it was wonderful we loved them we moved with them we brought them with us but the problem was they they were old and it got to the point where even putting my arm in the sleeve had to be done with like almost absolute perfection to keep the whole sleeve from just falling off of the coat what am

I raising that for we patched them up but eventually the time came for us to throw them away the time comes when old garments are good for nothing but the trash now I know some of you who are living with other people are going to go home today and say that you know open up that closet of yours pastor said the time has come for some old garments they are good for nothing throw them in the trash that's what the illustration is saying hey fasting is a way of relating to God a way of keeping up with God it's not going to get it done in the new order you're going to need something that can cover you that doesn't need to be repaired Jesus is like he's like I've come you think I've come to put a band-aid on the human solution that's kind of what he's saying you think I've come to take a go down to the leather shop and buy a little thing and put it on your life and think that somehow I've come to make you a little better and patch you up along the way no what Jesus is!

It's worse than before if that's all I'm here to do says Jesus you're going to be destroyed I've come to cover you and back then to the quotes in Isaiah aren't they more meaningful now he says I'm going to put you in garments of righteousness I'm going to cover you with what you really need I'm going to give you a head dress that's beautiful I'm going to I'm not going to take you to the maintenance shop and fix you up I'm giving you a new car yeah some of you want a new car that's not really what he was saying at least it might have pulled you back for the next couple minutes old ways based on religious tradition are not strong enough to cover our need you need a new garment we just came through good friday where jesus and all his purity our sins on him and all of their crimson red we place we place our sins the garment of our life on his death substitution for us that we might rise on easter morning to a pure white robe of his righteousness that's how you get on with god following jesus places you in a new relationship word picture of fifteen following jesus then will mean that it's not through the practice of old religion the garment of sixteen nor is it wine skins in case you're really slow not yet quite there he throws out one more illustration on wine skins and notice this one is interesting if you're not sure how they drank wine in the old testament or the first century times you wouldn't go down to 57th street wines and buy a bottle that had been glass and stored and corked for however many years no you you made wine skins from goat skin and usually the neck of the goat became the funnel because it was complete and then you would stitch underneath and then you would actually treat the interior so that it would be supple and soft and like oil in a sense so that it would hold and then you would be able to stitch it and after all of that you wine that beautiful wine skin which you had made or used in your home well the interior of it would shrink when it didn't have any liquid in it and after shrinking it would dry and after drying it would split and after splitting it is just no good anymore and notice the difference between these two illustrations a garment is something that covers us the wine skin has to be right in order that something of value might be received by us oh now think of that think of something external that will cover you in relationship to

God but think of God doing something internal that you might receive the treasures of all that God has for you in Christ that's what he's doing here this is the difference and the distinction between the two illustrations they're similar but they're beautiful in the way that they're different if you want to hold the value of the gospel of Jesus Christ in your life you're going to have to be made new from the inside too and that's what the Holy Spirit will do Jesus will take up residence in your life if you ask him to you already know your interior world is dry why are you chasing the same stuff that keeps leaking out you know it's cracked you know you're split you need a new wineskin you need to be born again you need to be able to hold something of eternal weight value

[ 30 : 32 ] Jesus says you know why are my guys not doing the religious tradition thing one because they know we're at a wedding here not a funeral and I'm the bridegroom two they know that they need a covering that all your religious tradition band-aids won't do three they need to know that they've got to be made new from the inside out with Jesus then his righteousness will cover us with Jesus his spirit will soften us with Jesus he will actually by his spirit indwell us let me just close it down following Jesus will place you in a new relationship not the practice of an old religion is that not good news I mean let me let me put it the way some of you think about it do you not need a new relationship we're chasing relationship now think about your relationship with God do you not need a new relationship with God and how are you going to get it not by religion just by saying to him

I'm signing up to be a wedding guest I want to be present as you marry your bride I want to be counted among that I want you to cover me because this old raccoon skin coat is dry this old heart hard Keith green my eyes are dry my heart is cold look to Jesus ask him to change your life today

our heavenly father we we want something that's intimate and secure we want a relationship that's personal and transcendent we want our lives to be different we want to know you and know that we are known by you thank you for this question that these these ardent seekers after you asked because it allowed us to hear the word of Christ turn our eyes upon him turn our hearts into flesh change our lives that that which comes out of us would be valuable even to those in our midst Jesus name we pray amen let's get on our feet