

Out With the Old...

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[0 : 00] So Luke chapter 5, and the last thing we read about there was how Jesus called Levi, also known as Matthew, to be one of his disciples. And we read about how Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house.

And the guests were Levi's fellow tax collectors and others deemed sinners by the Pharisees and teachers of the law. And we heard the question, which is really a statement that the Pharisees made to Jesus' disciples.

Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners? And Jesus told them, it is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.

I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. Let's continue the conversation between Jesus and the Pharisees in verse 33.

The Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, John's disciples often fast and pray, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees. But yours go on eating and drinking.

[1 : 13] What are the Pharisees saying here? They are comparing the disciples of John the Baptist and their own disciples with the disciples of Jesus.

And they are making an accusation here. They are saying, we know that John's disciples are devoted to God because they fast.

They deny themselves food and drink. We know that we are devoted to God because our disciples fast. We deny ourselves food and drink. But look at your disciples.

Look at you. Stuffing your faces with food and chugging down the drinks with these sinners. The Pharisees are accusing Jesus and his disciples of being immoral, gluttons, and drunkards.

Just like some of the guests at Levi's party may have actually been. And we hear a bit of confirmation that this is what they are thinking. A little later in Luke's Gospel, when we get to chapter 7, Jesus says this about their remarks.

[2 : 20] Chapter 7, verse 33. For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine. And you say, he has a demon. The son of man came eating and drinking.

And you say, here's a glutton and a drunkard. A friend of tax collectors and sinners. And Jesus is making a point there about their attitude towards him.

They are poised to find fault with Jesus. No matter what he and his disciples do. Here Jesus is having a banquet as Matthew's guest of honor.

And they're accusing him and his disciples of failing to fast and pray like they do. It's also worth mentioning here what we know about the Pharisees and how they fasted.

Jesus, much later in Luke chapter 18, verse 12, will tell a parable about a self-righteous Pharisee and a tax collector who both prayed. And how each of them prayed.

[3 : 22] And listen to how Jesus describes the prayer of the Pharisee in his parable. He says, We're going to look more closely at that parable of Jesus when we get to it.

But for now we notice the mention of how the Pharisees fasted routinely twice a week. The primary day for going to the synagogue was the Sabbath day.

But the Pharisees advocated for a tradition of also going on Mondays and Thursdays and fasting on each of those days. So the kind of fasting referred to here is not the Day of Atonement fast or of grieving in tragic and desperate times.

This is routine, weekly religious fasting. And the Pharisees are accusing Jesus' disciples of failing to fast and pray like they do.

Perhaps Levi's banquet for Jesus was even held on a Monday or a Thursday. Let's hear Jesus' response to this. Verse 34.

[4 : 41] Jesus answered, Can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? I'm always amazed at how Jesus can say so much, so brilliantly with so few words.

He responds to them with a simple question. Can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while he is with them?

Now there's a whole cultural difference between weddings the way we do them and back then. So let me just translate that question into our cultural context. Can you expect the bridal party to abstain from eating and drinking at the wedding reception?

In other words, fasting, abstaining from food only fits, it only makes sense in times of grief, in times of mourning, in times of loss, or desperation, or longing.

You don't fast in a time of celebration. Can you imagine if it was your birthday on Saturday and all your friends said, This year, instead of planning a party for you, we're going to stay home and fast and pray for you.

[5 : 58] You'd be thinking, What do they see in me that's so terribly wrong? There is a time to celebrate. There is a time to feast, to eat and to drink, to kill the fattened calf.

That's why none of my disciples are fasting, says Jesus, because that time is now. Think of this from the disciples' perspective.

For centuries, they've been awaiting the Messiah that God had promised so long ago. And now, here he is. And he's doing all these wonderful signs and miracles.

He's healing people of all kinds of things, even lifelong disabilities. He's casting demons out of people. Multiplying bread.

Miraculous catches of fish. Walking on water. Jesus' disciples are ecstatic. They're overwhelmed with excited joy, day after day, as they watch all this.

[7 : 00] This is a time for celebration. This is the time to kill the fattened calf, just like Levi has done. To abstain from food and drink at this time is altogether inappropriate and unfitting.

And so what the Pharisees are saying here is downright dirty. The disciples of Jesus, they're doing exactly what they should be. They're welcoming Jesus the way that they should be.

They're celebrating their Messiah who has finally come. And the Pharisees are denouncing them as immoral, gluttons, drunkards, partying with greedy and wealthy sinners.

When you should be showing your devotion to God and fasting today like we are. So with this one simple question, Jesus basically rebukes their hypocritical religiosity.

And at the same time, he tells them this simple truth. Now is the time to celebrate. Now is the time to feast. And you guys are missing it.

[8 : 06] The bridegroom is here. We notice as we go on a little bit in verse 35 though, that there is a time coming for fasting.

Jesus says, but the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them. In those days, they will fast. Jesus speaks prophetically here.

And as we reflect on this, it's not explicitly clear when exactly Jesus is referring to. When will Jesus be taken away from his disciples?

The first moment that came to my mind was when he was taken away from them in the Garden of Gethsemane. Very physically and visibly taken away from them the night before he died.

And the events leading up to his death were awful. That was certainly a time for fasting and praying. In fact, Jesus even urged his disciples that night just before it happened, pray.

[9 : 14] Keep watch. Pray. We might also think to the moment that Jesus died on the cross and the days which followed. There's certainly a sense in which Jesus was taken away from them by his death.

And we know from the Gospels that it was a time of great sorrow for Jesus' followers. Certainly an occasion for fasting, if they even had any appetite for food at all.

But then, all of that was interrupted and ended by Jesus' resurrection on the third day. Suddenly the bridegroom was with them again. And their grief completely melted away and turned to joy.

So was Jesus only talking about how they would fast in the future around the time of his death?

Another moment when Jesus is taken away from them occurred 40 days after his resurrection.

When Jesus was taken up to heaven. Is this the moment Jesus meant? There's certainly a sense in which Jesus was removed from them and no longer with them as he was before.

[10 : 26] Did the disciples all go back into Jerusalem and abstain from food and drink for the next number of days? Sad that Jesus had been taken away from them to heaven. Possibly.

But we also don't see anything in the accounts of Jesus ascending to heaven that suggests it was a time of sorrow or grief for the disciples. Perhaps they even saw Jesus' ascension as an occasion to celebrate.

Much like the resurrection. A great miraculous entrance of their Lord into heaven. Until he should return. So it's not easy to pin down exactly when Jesus is referring to here.

When would they fast? Even if we see Jesus' ascension into heaven as the moment that he was taken from them. There's also the wonderful moment of the spirit of Jesus being poured out on them.

And coming to live inside of them. Not long after at Pentecost. Which was certainly an occasion of joy. Or was this fasting that Jesus spoke of tied only to the difficult moments that they would later face in Jesus' absence?

[11 : 39] Perhaps coming moments of persecution. Or difficult decisions. When they had a longing for Christ to be present with them physically. As he used to be.

And so one of the challenges that we face today as Christians is simply understanding. What place should fasting have in our lives? It's challenging in part because fasting is not even at all a part of our culture today.

Like it was in theirs. It's not part of the weekly routine. As it was for the Pharisees. It's not even part of how we typically mourn. Like it was back then.

Take a modern day funeral for example. There's still grief. There are still tears. There are still tears. But then what do we do at the end? We eat and drink together.

We do the exact opposite of what they did back then. They would abstain from food and drink when someone died. They would fast as part of their grieving. But we actually put on a meal for all the guests who have come.

[12 : 42] And many see it as a celebration of the life of that person. Rather than simply an occasion of loss. And so it's challenging to figure out what place should this practice have in our lives.

Not only that but fasting at its best in the Bible is a very God-focused activity. It's almost always accompanied by prayer. Or by a request or a petition of some sort.

And we don't see anything like that in our culture today. The only kind of fasting we see is maybe before a surgery for medical reasons. Or in a time of really deep grief where an appetite is lost. But there's no turning to God in our culture. It's not done for reasons that are spiritual at all. And then the question is further complicated.

When we look at everything in the Bible about fasting and what it says. We see that it was often done in a way that displeased God. The way Jesus describes it in the parable with the Pharisee and the tax collector.

[13 : 48] You know it seems like it's become a heartless expression of religiosity. A way for the self-righteous to pride themselves in their devotion to God compared to others.

There's even one major passage in Isaiah where God actually tells the people enough with your fasting. Stop it. I don't want to see that anymore. We could add to this the reality that nowhere in the New Testament are Christians commanded to fast.

It's spoken of in a few places as something that was done or that may be done. One of these days it would be good for us to just sit down together.

And dig deeper into the issue. Seek the Lord's heart on this matter. Should we fast as Christians? And if so, when? On what occasions?

What's the right heart attitude to have when we fast? And what's the heart attitude that we should not have when we fast? But for today as we look at this passage, the main point of Jesus here is that for his disciples at this time, fasting was inappropriate.

[15 : 00] He gave the wedding analogy. The bridegroom is here. And now Jesus moves on to give a couple more illustrations to make the point. Verse 36. He told them this parable.

No one tears a piece out of a new garment to patch an old one. Otherwise, they will have torn the new garment. And the patch from the new will not match the old.

And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins. The wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined.

No. New wine must be poured into new wineskins. And no one after drinking old wine wants the new. For they say the old is better.

The funny thing about these illustrations is that back then they would have made perfect sense. But in our day and culture today, these are less familiar things.

[16:03] Wine is almost always stored in bottles nowadays rather than wineskins. And even mending clothes is far less common than it used to be. Now when we get a tear in a piece of clothing, we just throw it in the donate box.

Patching garments is often only done out of necessity. And much less by younger generations. So let's look at some of these a little more closely to see if we can understand what Jesus is saying here.

Let's start with the first one. No one tears a piece out of a new garment to patch an old one. Two of the other Gospels also mention this analogy.

But interestingly, Luke highlights something a little different than the other two. Maybe you're familiar with the other Gospels and how it talks about the problem of patching an old garment with unshrunk cloth.

And that was a part of what Jesus said on this occasion. But Luke captures a bit of a different emphasis here. No one tears a piece out of a new garment to patch an old one.

[17:08] Otherwise, they will have torn the new garment. And the patch from the new will not match the old. So imagine going to a store and buying a brand new pair of jeans.

Even trying them on. Yeah. Great. They fit perfect. And then you poke a hole in them and you reach in and you tear out a big chunk of material. And you make a patch for a hole using that material in your old jeans.

For your old jeans. So you can keep wearing the old jeans. Who would do that? That's ridiculous. Wouldn't it make more sense to just wear the new jeans that you just bought?

They're brand new. All the way around. And the worst thing about it is that when we factor in what Jesus also said in the other Gospels. Reported by the other Gospels.

About the problem of sewing an unshrunk patch on an old garment. It would actually end up causing more problems to the old garment. And the patch would fail.

[18:15] So then you've ruined the new pair. And the old pair is worse than it was. How does this translate? To Jesus.

Jesus coming is like us getting a brand new pair of jeans given to us. The sensible thing to do is to receive them. To receive Jesus as the new gift of God that he is to us.

And to wear the new jeans. To follow the new king. The new prophet. The savior. The new is better than the old.

But rather than accepting him. The Pharisees are doing the absurd. They're saying we prefer the old jeans. Even though they're full of holes.

We prefer the old ways. We prefer our traditions. We prefer the old prophets. Like Moses. And the law. And the instruction that he gave us. So we'll just take the best of what Jesus has to say.

[19:14] And we'll bring it over and put it in together. With the good old stuff. Jesus is saying. Listen guys. That's not going to work.

There's an incompatibility here. By trying to mix the old and the new in this way. You're ruining the new that God has given you. And you're not making the old any better.

Let's put this in terms of vehicles. You're driving a 20 year old Dodge Caravan. It's covered in rust. The headlights are scuffed and yellow.

Half the electronics in the vehicles don't work. The passenger door doesn't open. The driver's window doesn't roll down. The air conditioning is gone. The transmission slips in third.

And sometimes gets stuck in fourth. The engine is making a loud ticking noise. And it's got about 385,000 kilometers on it. I'm really sorry if I'm describing your vehicle right now.

[20:13] Hopefully not. And then someone comes along and gives you a gift. A brand new 2025 Dodge Caravan. Would you start removing the parts of the new one?

To fix the old one. That's absurd. Just get rid of the old caravan and drive the new one. Jesus is the new who has been given to us.

And the new is better than the old. And yet the Pharisees refused to accept him. And they are clinging to the old. Let's look at this analogy of wine and wineskins.

In verse 37. No one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise the new wine will burst the skins. The wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined.

No. New wine must be poured into new wineskins. New Testament scholar Daryl Bach. In his commentary on this passage.

[21 : 18] Writes the following. He says wineskins were usually made from sheepskin. Or goatskin. And the neck area of the animal. Became the neck of the container.

The body portion was skinned. And the hair removed. And the hide was treated to prevent the skin from changing the taste of the contents.

Finally it was sewn together. Over time. The skin of such a container would age. And become brittle. Someone foolishly might try to put new wine in old skins.

But when the new wine ferments. It expands the container. And the skin bursts. Being unable to expand. Because it is brittle and old.

The new wine pours out. And the old skin is destroyed. And that of course would be a shame. The juice would be wasted. And the wineskin would be wrecked.

[22 : 17] Jesus makes the final point of this analogy. Clear in verse 38. No. New wine must be poured into new wineskins.

What's Jesus saying here? He's saying that you can't just combine the old with the new. They're incompatible. They're not fit to each other.

Finally there's the last statement of Jesus in verse 39. And no one after drinking old wine wants the new. For they say the old is better.

This is related to the two analogies that came before. But maybe could be its own analogy. And it's maybe a little tricky to interpret.

Just as a full disclosure here. I am not a person who consumes alcohol. And I don't know hardly anything about it. So most of what I'm about to say is just based on my own research.

[23 : 18] And digging around online. So don't hear this and think. Oh I've got to go to the liquor store and get a bottle of wine. Jesus is playing into a cultural conviction.

That when it comes to wine. The older is always better than the newer. And most of us have probably heard or even just accepted that. Well yeah. When it comes to wine.

Old is better than new. We often hear people talking about the vintage of wines. And yet the reality is. That just because a wine is older. Doesn't mean that it's going to taste better.

Apparently vintage has to do with how a particular year's wine tastes. Because of how the climate of that region. Affected the flavor of the grapes that year.

Apparently the vast majority of wines sold in the market today. Taste about as good as they're going to taste. By the time you buy them off the shelf. Which is only 6 to 12 months after harvest.

[24 : 25] Range wines apparently taste a little bit better. One to two years after harvest. And only the premium expensive stuff. Is even concocted in a way that the flavors may continue to improve.

After five or more years. And so. What makes the old. Better than the new. In the minds of most people. Well think of it this way.

In 1964. Growing conditions were good. In the Bordeaux region of France. Let's say you bought that year's wine. And you loved it. Really good stuff.

But then for the next three years. Growing conditions were poor. And the wine. Reflected that. It was poor. In that region. And so if you could still get the 64 stuff.

That you had bought. Or had it. That would be the good stuff. The older would be better. And the 65 to 67. Well that would be inferior. Now imagine that you like that 64 stuff.

[25 : 26] So much. That you bought a whole bunch of it. And you saved it. For special occasions. For years to come. And then imagine that years later. In 1983.

Everyone starts raving. About the 1982 Bordeaux. And you won't even try it. Why? Because. It's brand new.

How can it be better than the old 64? Well as history would have it. The 64 was only good. But the 82 Bordeaux. Is considered legendary.

They tried some new things. With how they made it. And people absolutely loved it. And so what is Jesus saying here? He's saying that the old. Isn't always better.

Than the new. What we considered old. And better. Well at one time. It was the new. It was the best. But is there room in our hearts.

[26 : 25] For the possibility. That God is doing something new again. Something far better. Than the old. Jesus is saying that we often cling to the old.

And familiar. And reject the new. Out of principle. But in doing so. We're missing out on the very best. That God has come.

To offer us. Jesus. Has come. It's a new thing. That God is doing. He's the Messiah. That we've been longing for.

And so the old ways of. Fasting. And longing. Must now give way. To feasting. And celebration. This is sometimes a challenge.

For us to. Sort out. In our Christian faith. But there is a distinct line. Between. The old way of God's dealing with us. Which we can read about in the Old Testament.

[27 : 23] And the new way. Which is offered. Through Jesus. We read about it in the New Testament. And it's not because God has somehow changed. He hasn't changed.

It's because the way that God's chosen. To unfold his plan. Saves the best. For last. God was doing good and wonderful things.

With Abraham. But some of that. Paled in comparison. To how he revealed himself. To Moses. And the children of Israel. At the Red Sea. God entered into a wonderful covenant.

With Israel at Mount Sinai. But that old arrangement. Pales in comparison. To the new covenant. Which Christ came to inaugurate. Now don't get me wrong.

There's continuity between old and new. We enter into that relationship with God. In the same way. Through faith. It's the same God. And he will keep all of his promises. The ones made long ago.

[28 : 20] And the ones made more recently. But there's a massive difference still. Between the old. And the new. And Jesus. Himself. Puts that regular fasting. Such as John's disciples did.

And the Pharisees. Did. He calls that. The old wineskins. The old garment. The old way. And he tells us.

That the new garment. Is what we should wear now. The new and better wine. Is here. For which we need. New wineskins. To say it another way.

There are many things that fit. With the old covenant. With the old arrangement. That God had with his people Israel. Before Christ came. Things like circumcision. Temple sacrifices.

Annual festivals. Purification rituals. Some foods were considered unclean. And even. Routine fasting. But now God has brought about.

[29 : 17] A new covenant. Through Christ Jesus. And embracing this new covenant. Requires setting aside. Certain things. Fit only. For the old. Covenant.

In order to embrace. This new one. Attempting to mix them. Simply won't work. Trying to cling to the old. And patch it with the new. Is a failure.

To receive Jesus. For who he is. He is the fulfillment. Of the law. He himself. Is our righteousness. He is the bridegroom. Who has come.

Neither can we embrace the new. And you know. Mix in some old. Just like the old wineskins. Can't contain. The new wine. So the old covenant ways.

Are in some sense. Incompatible. With the new reality. That Christ has brought to us. In relation to fasting. In particular. Jesus does say.

[30 : 14] That his disciples. Will fast. When he is taken from them. And certainly. There is a time. For fasting. Even after Jesus has come. There is a time. To weep. There is a time.

To mourn. We're even commanded. To weep. With those who weep. There's also a time. To seek God. With desperation. For his intervention.

There are times. Where we long. So deeply. For the return. Of Jesus. And the final coming. Of his kingdom. That fasting. Is fitting. But there's also. An unshakable hope.

That we now have. In Christ. Which cannot be taken. Away from us. There is also. A command. To rejoice. Always. There is the presence.

Of Jesus himself. In us. Now. He is with us. Always. Always. Even to the end. Of the age. We have been born again.

[31 : 14] By his spirit. In ways they never were. Before Christ came. The coming of Christ. And what he has done for us. Brings about a new reality for us.

A new relationship with God. For us. Such that it's truly fitting. For us to rejoice. Always. And so fasting. Should not be. Just a religious routine.

For us. Today. As followers of Jesus. It doesn't fit. With the overall status. Of our new relationship. With God. And yet. We may fast.

In a season of grief. Or loss. Or depression. Or through a time of persecution. Or desperation. We may fast.

And pray for the salvation. Of a loved one. Or on an occasion. When we are filled with longing. For the return. Of the bridegroom. But aside from those kinds of things.

[32 : 08] Right now. We have. The new. We have. The better. We have Jesus. We have a new. And better covenant. We have full.

And free forgiveness. Of our sins. All of them. We have the new birth. And God's indwelling spirit. We have been united. With Christ. Christ. And we have.

The word of Jesus himself. That he will. Raise us from the dead. And cause us to share. In his coming kingdom. And all of these. Things. Are ongoing reasons. To rejoice. To celebrate.

And to feast. Often. In anticipation. Of his return. We could go on about this. There's. There's lots to say. Other passages.

In the bible. Speak to it. The book of Hebrews. Talks about old. Versus new covenant. How much better. The new is. The book of Galatians. Talks about the dangers.

[33 : 04] Of mixing. That old. With the new. Trying to practice. Circumcision. And keep the law. The book of Colossians. And parts of Romans. Addresses the efforts.

Of some. Who are trying to make. Religious rules. About eating. And drinking. And Sabbath keeping. And religious. Festival observance. This problem. Of clinging. To the old.

And even trying. To mix the old. With the new. Even continues today. But let's not be. Like the Pharisees. God does not want us.

To be just. Outwardly religious. Going through the motions. Doing the rituals. He's after our hearts. He wants a relationship. With each one of us.

He wants the things. That we do for him. To flow out. Of that relationship. Whether fasting. Or feasting. And sometimes. We may get the idea. That God is a killjoy.

[34 : 01] We may. Think that he doesn't. Want us to be happy. That he just. Only ever wants us. To practice. Self-denial. And to go without. But it's not true. There is a time.

For feasting. There is a time. For celebrating. And joy. And Jesus. Coming into our world. And into our lives. And all he is. And has done for us.

And he gives us. Countless reason. To rejoice. Always. And to feast. And celebrate. Often. In honor of him. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus. We thank you. That you have come. It makes all the difference. In our lives. And I pray. Pray. Pray. Pray. would fully surrender ourselves to you and embrace you as the new, as the one from the Father, as our King, as our Lord, as our God.

Fill our hearts with joy, we pray. We ask this in your name. Amen.