

Jesus the bridegroom

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 17 November 2024

Preacher: Phil Martin

[0 : 00] Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting, and people came and said to him, Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?

And Jesus said to them, Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast.

The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day. No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment.

If he does, the patch tears away from it, and the new from the old, and a worse tear is made.

And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is destroyed, and so are the skins.

[1 : 13] But new wine is for fresh wineskins. We are looking at the subject of the goodness of Jesus.

The goodness of Jesus in these four weeks. That is the topic that we're on, and that I think is Mark's subject in this section, between chapter 2, verse 13, and chapter 3, verse 6.

By the way, do think about those you might like to invite along. Neighbours or friends to come and look at these passages on a Sunday.

It would be great to see people with us. I just want to begin by asking us to imagine if God, who made the universe, every mountain and stream, the birds, the flowers, the crystal seas, if that God had committed himself to fill you with joy forever.

It almost defies words. We can't really grasp it. Just look down with me at verse 19.

[2 : 38] Jesus says, Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast.

The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away. Notice the repeated word. Bridegroom, bridegroom, bridegroom. That's the heart of this section.

Jesus says that he is like a bridegroom. His kingdom like a wedding feast.

And his people like honoured guests. In other words, and this is where we're going today, he has committed himself to the everlasting joy of his people.

Where can we find happiness? That's a question that the preoccupied, apparently preoccupied the ancient philosophers. I won't pretend that I know an awful lot about it.

[3 : 44] But apparently, Socrates said happiness. You can only find happiness if you're poor. Only the poor people can find happiness because they have nothing to lose.

Aristotle, on the other hand, said you have to be born rich and happy. In reality, you have to be healthy, wealthy, good family and good friends to be happy.

Common sense. A little bit of common sense, perhaps, there. Epicurus said if you remove all causes of pain, you can be happy. So don't spend time with irritating people or doing annoying things.

Pleasure is the absence of suffering. Stoicism. Life is about suffering. And so happiness is just to accept suffering with serenity.

Hedonism. Happiness is spending time doing what gives you pleasure. Thing is, if any of these things worked, we would have discovered it by now.

[4 : 49] They are empty philosophies. In 2008, 4,000 books were published on happiness. Good luck finding the answer there.

There was a TED Talk recently, which talked about research that had been done. came to the conclusion that if somebody has good relationships, it's good relationships that mean you can live longer.

So the research shows you live longer if you've got good relationships. And there may be some truth to that. But then what? Where can we find the lasting happiness, the lasting joy that we long for?

Well, Jesus Christ declared himself to be the answer. Two points today. Who is Jesus?

Last week we saw that he is the doctor for sin. Come for sinners. And that's the passage before this one. And Mark goes on and shows us more of the goodness of Jesus.

[5 : 57] That he is the bridegroom who has committed himself to the everlasting joy of his people. In other words, to take those sinners that he has come for and to bring them to his wedding feast as honoured guests forever in his kingdom.

Just look down at verse 18. Let's look at these verses together. Verse 18. John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. And people came and said to him, Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?

Why are they not doing what we're doing? Now, I don't think this is about the rights and wrongs of fasting. We could get easily sidetracked into that issue, and we're not going to today, because I don't think it's the issue, actually.

After all, Jesus says later that his disciples will fast in verse 20. The issue is joy and sadness.

In the Old Testament, fasting was always, if not always, an expression of some kind of sadness or contrition or sombre reflecting or mourning.

[7 : 25] Okay, so there was one fast that was prescribed in the Old Testament, which is on the Day of Atonement, a prescribed fast, and lots of described fasts. You might remember King David when his son is about to die, fasting.

You might remember Esther when the Jews are threatened, about to be destroyed, calls a fast. It is always associated with mourning or sombre reflection, repentance of sin.

The fact that Jesus says that they can't fast with the bridegroom, I think, confirms that the issue is joy.

Verse 19, can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? In other words, he has brought feasting, not fasting. That is, it would be completely inappropriate for the wedding guests to be in a state of mourning while the bridegroom is with them.

Imagine the wedding where everyone came dressed in black. I don't know if this happened for your wedding. Everyone came dressed in black for a funeral. And you get an impression for what Jesus is saying here.

[8 : 40] It would be even more inappropriate for these wedding guests to be fasting because the phrase wedding guests is literally sons of the wedding.

That meant the honoured guests. Top table. I'm usually on table 27 at the weddings that I'm invited to.

Occasionally, you are the honoured wedding guest, aren't you? The family, the groomsman, the bridesmaid on top table. These are not the wedding crashers.

Neither are they the people you feel you have to invite because they're your mum's dentist's best friend. These are the sons of the wedding. And so imagine turning up to your friend's wedding as an usher dressed in funeral black and saying, sorry mate, I'm not eating or drinking today.

I'm not in the mood to have any fun. The issue is joy. And Jesus is saying, I'm like a bridegroom, my kingdom like a wedding feast, and my people, the honoured guests.

[9 : 59] I wonder, did you realise that that is who the Son of God claims to be? He's not come to impose a religion on us.

When people say to me quite often, they say, I'm not religious. Well, I say, neither am I. Jesus has not come to impose a religion on us.

He has not come to impose religious rules on us. That is what man-made religion does. The Pharisees fasted twice a week. But Christ has come to bring us into a relationship of joy.

And that stands at the heart of Christianity. He is the bridegroom. Who has come to bring us into a relationship of joy and a future that is beyond words to describe.

Like a wedding feast forever. This becomes clearer when we consider who Jesus is. So come back to Mark chapter 1 verse 3.

[11 : 16] Where this verse is a prophecy from Isaiah about John the Baptist. And notice who he's going to prepare the way for. Prepare the way of the Lord.

Which in Isaiah is the word Yahweh. The name of God. John then says, One mightier than I is coming.

I'm not even worthy to stoop down and untie his sandals. Who is Jesus? Jesus is God. God himself. And so God himself is describing himself as a bridegroom. Do you find that weird? Have you ever heard it before?

In fact, And I just want to take us back here. That God has promised, Had promised, That he would come like a bridegroom for his people.

[12:11] Can you flick back to Isaiah chapter 62 verse 5? I'm afraid I didn't get a page. In the 700s. Isaiah chapter 62. Verse 5.

Anyone got a page? 7-5-2. I'll read from verse 4. Now God here is speaking to his people.

Zion. You shall no more be termed forsaken, And your land shall no more be termed desolate. But you shall be called, My delight is in her, And your land married.

For the Lord delights in you, And your land shall be married. For as the young man marries a young woman, So shall your sons marry you. And here it is.

As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, So shall your God rejoice over you. Can you see that? Here is God. Here is God promising that one day, He would come, As a bridegroom for his people.

[13:26] Now flick back to Mark. What is Jesus saying? Well, as he takes this title for himself, It is an implicit claim to deity.

He is saying that he is God, As promised. But secondly, He is saying that he is committed to the everlasting joy of his people.

Why would God describe himself as a bridegroom come for his people, If he was not saying, I am committed to the everlasting joy of my people? Heaven will be like a wedding banquet.

And thirdly, You can see from his claim to be the bridegroom, That the focus of his salvation is now a new relationship of joy, Between his people and himself, As between a bridegroom and his closest friends.

Actually, It is not what he has come to provide, But in the bridegroom himself, That the people will find their joy, Above all.

[14:40] Just look at verse 19 again. As long as they have the bridegroom with them, They cannot fast. Their joy is in being with the bridegroom.

It is in the bridegroom himself. Verse 20 adds something important. Just look at verse 20.

The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, And then, In that day, They will fast. Now, This is about the timings of the kingdom.

So, The days are coming, When I'll be taken away, Jesus says, Referring to his death and resurrection, And his ascension to the Father. He says, In those days, My people will fast.

In other words, There will be cause for mourning, For the Christian, In those days. Why? Because they long so much, To be reunited with the bridegroom.

[15:46] And so, Very early on, In the ministry of Jesus, He began to make it clear, That his first coming to earth, He did not come to bring his kingdom, In all its fullness, But to give a glimpse of the eternal kingdom to come, Like a trailer.

The full experience of his kingdom, Is for later when he comes again. Just before his death, You'll remember this if you know Mark's gospel. Jesus says, I will now not drink wine, Until that day, When I drink it new, With you in the kingdom.

And so that is why, The cry of the church, And of the Christian, Is come Lord Jesus. So at the very end of the Bible, In Revelation 20, Why does the Bible end there?

With the cry, Come Lord Jesus. Well because the church, Is longing for and waiting, For that day when, She can be reunited, With the bridegroom.

We are currently living in, The days of verse 20, In those days they will fast. Of course, The true Christian, The true Christian, Longs, To be with Jesus again.

[17:17] Of course they do. He is the one, Who can make all things right. Chapter one has shown that. He's shown he can drive out evil.

He's shown he can heal, Every disease with a word. He's shown, That he can free us, From the paralyzing effects of sin. Forever.

Well, One major implication of verse 20, Is that the best is yet to come, For the follower of Jesus.

We do not find ultimate joy, And happiness in this short life, Because to be with Christ, Forever in his kingdom, At his wedding feast, As his honoured guests, Well that is the deep cry, And ambition

of the heart, Of every true Christian.

Are there tears today? Yes. And you may be experiencing that. Very much there are. Many, Many tears.

Even more so, For the Christian. We're in the days of verse 20. But when you think about it, How many of those tears, Stem ultimately, From the fact that you are still in this world, Away from Christ, Your bridegroom.

[18 : 43] All of them. And if you're here with us as a guest, Perhaps you're just looking into Christianity, Well if you come to faith in Christ, Can you see this?

You do not come to a religion. You come into an intimate relationship with God, As your bridegroom, Who has committed himself to your joy forever.

And you come into a great hope. Well secondly, What has Jesus come to bring? What has Jesus come to bring?

And that's verses 21 to 22, A completely new kingdom. No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth, On an old garment. If he does, The patch tears away from it, And the new from the old, And a worse tear is made.

And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, The wine will burst the skins, And the wine is destroyed, And so are the skins. But new wine is for fresh wineskins.

[19 : 47] I don't have a wineskin. Never owned one. Have I ever seen one? I'm not sure I have. But apparently, Wineskins had one life. You know, So it was a leather thing.

You put the wine in it, And then the wine would ferment in it. But as that happened, It would stretch. And then you'd have your wine. But then if you tried to do it again, In the old wineskin, There'd be no stretch left.

Burst. Explosion. That's the point. Well, what is the point? The point is that the new is here, Jesus says, And the new cannot go with the old.

They can't go together. Very, very simple. Both illustrations making the same point. The new is here, And the new cannot go with the old. But that raises the question, What does that mean?

What is the new? And what is the old? Well, I think it's plain in the context, That the new wine, Is the long promised kingdom of God, That he has come to bring.

[20 : 55] Just look at 1 verse 15. 1 verse 15. Jesus comes and he proclaims, The time is fulfilled.

The time is here. And the kingdom of God is at hand. That is the new thing. That is the new wine. Jesus, The bridegroom, Bringing the kingdom of God.

And more than this, This completely new thing, Cannot just be tacked on to the old. It raises the question then, What then is the old?

That it can't be tacked on to. Well, in the first instance, The old is the traditions of the Jewish leaders of the day, That they were wedded to, That the Pharisees were fasting twice a week. In fact, We will find that the whole old covenant, Law of Moses, The old covenant, Well, that is the old, Which we will see next week.

[22 : 11] In fact, Bigger than that, It is this whole world order. This whole creation. Later, In Mark's gospel, Jesus says, Heaven and earth will pass away, When I come again with my kingdom.

At his return. And so, In fact, At the biggest level, The old is this whole old creation. Brittle, Like an old worn out wineskin, About to break.

This city. With all its Grandeur. It cannot ultimately coexist, With the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

New wine is for fresh wineskins, A new kingdom, Is for a new creation. The old is going to be set aside, And replaced by the new.

And so they ask the question, In verse 18, Why can't your disciples conform to our traditions? To what we've always done?

[23 : 20] And Jesus says, You've not even begun to grasp, The size of what I've come to do. It is root and branch change.

And when you think about it, Of course it is. He's come to bring the everlasting kingdom of God. Promised. Long promised in the Old Testament. Well, What does this mean for us?

And this is where we're going to land, This morning. What does this mean for us? It means that the Lord Jesus and his kingdom, Will not simply be tacked on to what's already there. Okay. So what does that mean?

Well we see this, I think at the big level, He's not come to improve, The old covenant law of Moses, By adding himself onto it. We'll see more of that next week. He's come to bring something

completely new, A new relationship of joy between God and man, Bridegroom and friends. We love trying to tack Jesus on to what's already there. We're pretty good at that, I think. To keep the old, And get a bit of Jesus onto it.

[24 : 30] To spice it up. There's loads of ways in which that happens today, And has been happening for the last 2,000 years. You see it in many world religions, I think, Where they have some role for Jesus, Stick him in there, But keep the rest of the old, The religion there.

You see it currently, I think, In the church, As we try to keep the old, That is the values of this world, Of our culture, And tack Jesus on. But this truth matters, I think, At the personal level as well. Individually. And we're just going to think about that for a second. We can't just add Jesus onto our old ambitions, Beliefs and priorities, Like a tack on.

If we come to Jesus, And follow him, He is going to tear up the old, And start afresh. There's an Australian rugby player, Which you may have heard of, Called Israel Folau. And he's a Christian. He did a lovely interview recently, After he was sacked by the Australian rugby team, For posting a Twitter quote from the Bible.

[25 : 46] Posting on Twitter, A quote from the Bible. And he said the hardest bit was, He was told to take, When he was told to take it down, By Rugby Australia, They said, Look, If you take it down and issue an apology, You can keep your job.

And so he was given, He was given the chance, He was such a good player, They didn't want to lose it. He said that was the hardest moment of temptation for him, To back down, And to be ashamed of the word of God.

But he said no, Kept it up, And with that, Went years, Of blood, Sweat, And tears, And ambition, To reach the top as a rugby player.

His teammates, Dumbfounded. What are you doing mate? Begging him, Begging him not to do it. But because he is a follower of Jesus Christ, He is dancing to a different drum.

Because now he is living as a guest of the bridegroom, And looking for that future. He has one ambition, Which is to be with his bridegroom forever.

[26 : 59] And that trumps all others. It's the same for us, If we would follow Jesus. We should not expect, Being a Christian, Simply to add an element of hope, To our existing lives.

Oh, I'm going to heaven now, Like a heaven add-on. But rather, The reign of Christ, Is going to involve complete, Root and branch change, Of all of our ambitions, And hopes and dreams. The old is gone. One new ambition, Governed by this new relationship, To be with our bridegroom, Jesus Christ, And to enjoy him forever.

And that's going to change everything about our lives. And it will lead to a clash, Of values and behaviour, Between Jesus' disciples, And the world around.

They say, Why don't your disciples, Live like everyone else? And they might have said, Why don't your disciples, Wear the rainbow lanyard, At work?

[28 : 01] Why don't they do, What everyone else is doing? Why don't they use pronouns, On their emails? Why don't they celebrate, Halloween like everyone else? Why don't they do, What everyone else is doing?

The Christian disciples, Should expect to be an oddity, To the watching world. Why? Because we are dancing, To a completely, Different drum beat.

The beat of this new relationship, With the bridegroom. One of the main features, Of Dulwich religion, If you could call it that, Is parents driving, Driving their children, To academic, Or sporting brilliance.

But, Those things will, Not be a matter, Of particular concern, To us. Who know Christ. In that sense, We will be an oddity.

Wouldn't it be great, If people knew, Grace Church, Weird people over there, They don't seem to, Have the same, Kind of ambition, For their children, As we do. Would they have a completely, Different ambition for them?

[29 : 10] That they would know, The bridegroom. What a small ambition, For your children, For our children, That they might get, Some good grades. How much greater, To be with, Jesus, In the kingdom forever.

We will not just, Be an oddity. I take it, The, There's a sense here, From the Pharisees, Of how dare you, Dismiss our treasured values. It's actually offensive.

It was then, And it will be today. But if we follow Jesus, We are living for our Lord, And bridegroom, And that means, Our whole lives, Will clash, With the priorities, Of the watching world, Just as they did then.

The new does not go, With the old. And actually, The way that the disciples live, Well that is, If you like, The first signs, Of the new, Superseding, The old.

Don't be discouraged, It's normal, Expect it. Two conclusions, Very briefly, So what? Number one, The true Christian, Longs, To be with their bridegroom, That is our dominant hope, And ambition.

[30 : 26] Pray therefore, That our eyes, Would be increasingly fixed, On that day, Of unimaginable joy, The wedding feast. And secondly, In the present, Don't be surprised, If our lives, Do not conform, To the traditions, And expectations, Of, Society, Around.

Let's pray. Father, We do thank you, That at the heart, Of the gospel, And of the message, Of the Bible, Is not a religion, But a relationship, A relationship, Of joy, And a future, To die for, To live for, To long for, A wedding feast, That we can barely, Get our minds round, With a bridegroom, A God, The Lord Jesus, Who has committed himself, To our everlasting joy.

Father, As the tears, May roll, In the present, Keep us fixed, On that day, When one day, We will be with him, Again.

And we pray, In Jesus name, Amen.