

Old - or new?

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[0 : 00] Luke chapter 5, beginning at verse 33. And they said to him, The disciples of John fast often and offer prayers, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours eat and drink.

And Jesus said to them, Can you make wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days. He also told them a parable.

On a Sabbath, while he was going through the grain fields, his disciples plucked and ate some ears of corn, rubbing them into their hands. But some of the Pharisees said, Why are you doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath?

And Jesus answered them, Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him, how he entered the house of God and took and ate the bread of the presence, which is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those with him.

And he said to them, The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath. On another Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was withered.

[1 : 38] And the scribes and the Pharisees watched him to see whether he would heal on the Sabbath, so that they might find a reason to accuse him. But he knew their thoughts, and he said to the man with the withered hand, Come and stand here.

And he rose and stood there. And Jesus said to them, I ask you, Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to destroy it?

And after looking around at them all, he said to him, Stretch out your hand. And he did so, and his hand was restored. But they were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus.

Sarah, thanks very much indeed for reading. Please do keep the Bible reading open, page 1038, if you've closed the Bible. Now, several years ago, an old painting was rediscovered in America. It was entitled Iceberg, and it came to light in a boy's school in a place called Northerndon. For years, it had been gathering dust. A ladder had been stood up against it.

[2 : 41] At one point, it had been used as a dartboard. One boy had even added his own signature to the artists. And yet, by the time it had been restored and taken to Sotheby's, it was then sold for \$2.5 million in New York.

That painting was rediscovered when someone took a second look and realised it was of the most enormous value.

And my aim this morning, as we look at this next section of Luke's Gospel, this eyewitness, carefully researched account, is for us to take a second look at Jesus Christ.

Because it seems to me, and I guess most of us recognise this for ourselves, that it's all too easy to have a small view of Jesus, to fail to appreciate how very valuable and how very wonderful he is. Now, at first sight, these verses look as if they have to do, don't they, with petty squabbles about fasting and what you can and cannot do on a Sabbath. I guess the very things which, frankly, put most of us off religion altogether.

[3 : 50] But actually, what Jesus is teaching about himself here is utterly mind-blowing. So put aside for the moment questions about whether or not Christians should fast or work on a Sunday.

That's not why Luke is writing. Instead, I want us just to focus on the two titles that Jesus uses for himself in these verses.

The first one, verse 34, Jesus describes himself as the bridegroom. The second one, chapter 6, verse 5, he is the Lord of the Sabbath.

And you'll find there's an outline on the back of the service sheet with those two headings there. Let's look at each one in turn. First of all, Jesus is the bridegroom, verse 33. And they said to him,

the disciples of John fast often and offer prayers.

And so are the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours eat and drink. Now, the context is verses 27 to 32. We looked at this several weeks ago. The calling of Levi to follow Jesus.

[4 : 54] If you thought that journalists were the lowest of the low, present company accepted, of course, then Levi as a tax collector would have been regarded as far worse.

And yet what does the Lord Jesus say to him? Verse 27, follow me. And we're told that leaving everything, he rose and followed him.

The religious and political establishment are shocked that Jesus tries to have anything to do with him. Jesus replies, verse 31, those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.

I have come not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. And that, you see, is what then leads to verse 33. Because they recognize that Jesus is calling into question their whole religious system.

A system based on religious observance and law keeping. How dare Jesus mix with people such as those who they regard as sinners? Now, it may be that, in a sense, that is your assumption.

[6 : 05] That Christianity is for good people. Religious people. In which case, Jesus' reply is utterly earth-shattering. Verse 34, Jesus says to them, Can you make wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them?

Now, this is one of the clearest claims of Jesus Christ in the New Testament to be God on earth. In the Old Testament, in Isaiah chapter 54, verse 5, God describes himself as the husband of his people.

He says, For your maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is his name, and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called.

In Isaiah 62, verse 5, God describes himself as the bridegroom of his people. As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.

Now, those of us who have been following our series in Luke will know by now that what Luke is writing is fulfillment. He is showing how the coming of Jesus Christ fulfilled everything that was promised beforehand in the Old Testament.

[7 : 18] It's why he quotes the Old Testament so much. So we shouldn't simply read Luke's gospel in the flat. If we do so, we'll entirely miss the enormous significance of what Jesus is saying here about being the bridegroom.

Because back in Isaiah, 600 years before the birth of Jesus, God's people had been taken into exile in Babylon. Some of them came to recognize that it was the righteous judgment of God for their sin and their rebellion against him.

And so they began a tradition of fasting and mourning for their sin and prayer that God would indeed restore his people. And that's precisely what he promised to do.

He says, like a forsaken young woman who needs to be loved and husbanded, so I am going to do that to my people, says God.

And now you see, as Jesus announces that he is the bridegroom, that moment has arrived. It's what Jesus proclaims in his manifesto, Luke chapter 4, verse 18.

[8 : 28] The spirit of the Lord is upon me. He has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. It's what we see Jesus doing as he calls Levi to follow him.

For those like Levi, who know they are far from God, who know they are sinners, as all of us are, who have pushed God to the very edges of our lives, it is such good news.

It is no wonder, is it, that Jesus says, verse 34, can you make wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? Rachel and I went to a wedding a few weeks ago, and as you would imagine, it was a day of glorious celebration.

But imagine if everyone had been dressed in black. Black dresses, black hats, black suits, black ties, a glum-looking and glum-sounding vicar, and an organ playing dirges.

How very inappropriate. Weddings are for rejoicing. As is the coming of Jesus Christ into the world. Indeed, says Jesus, another day is coming.

[9 : 41] Verse 35. The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days. Here Jesus is referring to his death.

Because, you see, he is so serious about bringing forgiveness and eternal life to those who are far from him, to those who are far from God, that he'll go to the cross and die, taking the penalty that

we deserve for our sins.

It is through the death of Jesus that we can be forgiven and right with God. And it's wonderful, wasn't it, to hear Warren saying that earlier on this morning.

Now, that spells the end for religion and the end for the Old Testament religious system. Verse 36. He also told them a parable. No one tears a piece from a new garment and puts it on an old garment. If he does, he will tear the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old.

[10:46] Now, it doesn't quite translate, does it, in our Primark culture, where you don't do some patching up of things. You just throw it away and buy another one for \$2.99 or whatever it is. But I guess we get the point.

You cannot simply patch Jesus on to the existing Old Testament religious structures. Likewise, verses 37 and 38.

No one puts new wine into old wine skins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed. But new wine must be put into fresh wine skins.

New wine that's still fermenting will split brittle old wine skins. New structures are needed. And next week, the next bit of Luke, we'll see precisely what those are.

Now, imagine for a moment that I decide that this might be an ideal Christmas present for one of my children.

[11:45] For those who are sitting at the back or who are listening online, it is a very simple brick phone. Anyway, I don't want to cause disappointment on the day, so I think to myself, I'll just kind of float the idea in advance just so there isn't any disappointment.

So I say, would you like one of these as a present on Christmas Day? It's very clever. It can make phone calls. You can even use it as an alarm clock.

And you know the very best thing about it is you can also listen to the radio on it. It's terribly clever. It's three devices in one. Well, how might my children respond?

I think this is the polite version. Dad, it was good in its day, but how about an iPhone 8? There may also be another version, but we won't go there this morning.

The Old Testament structures of priests, sacrifices, and temple were good in their day. They taught that God is a holy God, that he is serious about sin and judgment, that a sacrifice needs to be made for sin if we are to be forgiven and know him.

[13:00] But they were only temporary. Now that Jesus Christ has come, the bridegroom, they are redundant, just as, frankly, this phone is now redundant.

There's now no need for sacrifices because Jesus' death on the cross is the one sacrifice for sins. There's no need for priests, for a special cast of holy people because the risen Jesus is the priest who brings us into the presence of God.

There's no need for temples or special religious buildings in which those priests make those sacrifices. Indeed, some churches even meet in schools, as I am told. You see, the whole structure of the Old Testament religious system, the Old Covenant, is redundant.

Jesus Christ, the bridegroom. Secondly, Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath. Have a look at chapter 6, verses 1 to 2. On a Sabbath, while he was going through the grain fields, his disciples plucked and ate some ears of corn, rubbing them in their hands.

But some of the Pharisees said, why are you doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath? Now, the first century Jewish establishment had 39 categories of work that were forbidden on the Sabbath, and this was one of them.

[14:24] It counted as harvesting. Jesus replies, verse 3, have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him, how he entered the house of God and took and ate the bread of the presence, which is not lawful for any but the priests to eat.

And also to give it to those who were with him. Jesus replied, look, there's a legal precedent set by King David, the greatest of the Old Testament kings.

Now, Jesus could have stopped there and the matter would have been settled. And we'd never get to the explosive conclusion of verse 11.

But they are filled with fury and discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus. Because, you see, it is verse 5, just have a look at it, it is verse 5 that is so very incendiary.

As Jesus said to them, the Son of Man, speaking about himself, is Lord of the Sabbath. Do you notice how consistently and relentlessly Jesus challenges people to consider who he is?

[15:31] just as in the previous section, in chapter 5, verse 24, he says, but you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. To forgive sins, something only God can do.

And now he says he is the Lord of the Sabbath, the very Sabbath that God created. Now just to see the full force of this, I want us to keep a finger in Luke and turn back to the very beginning of the Bible to page 2 and to Genesis chapter 2.

Genesis chapter 2 on page 2 of the Bible. And here we see the original purpose of the Sabbath. Let me read Genesis 2 verses 2 and 3. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done.

So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation. God rests. His work of creation finished.

[16:53] The word rest translates the Hebrew word Shabbat or Sabbath. But God did not then sort of sit down in an armchair, put his feet up and watch TV and do nothing.

It's not a do-nothing rest. After all, he continues to sustain the world day by day, moment by moment. Rather, we are to see rest as the goal of creation as we then read on.

You can see the heading, The Creation of Man and Woman, as we then read on and we see what then happens in this rest day is that God is living with his people in his perfect place.

That is the goal of creation as God enjoys his perfect creation with those he has created. In other words, you and I do not live in an enormous goldfish bowl where the significance of life can simply be found within the bowl in terms of what we can see and touch all around us.

Sadly, of course, that is how so many live. they look for purpose of life as being successful at work or having the right lifestyle or a happy family as if those things are the ultimate things for which we were created.

[18:16] No. You and I are created for a relationship with God. It is why in the Old Testament God's people were to enjoy a Sabbath day of rest one day a week as they look upwards to the God who has created them and gave them life and as they look forwards to the new creation to heaven when once again they would enjoy the presence of God in his perfect world in the new creation in heaven.

It seems to me that one of the assumptions, perhaps especially amongst some of the more vocal atheists, is that to be a Christian is to be less human. It is to be less authentic.

it is to be less true to yourself. But in fact the very opposite is the case. To be a follower of Jesus Christ makes us more human because we have been created to know him, to be in relationship with him.

It is to discover our true purpose in life. St. Augustine famously said, we were made for you, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.

You see, just look at verse 5 again. What do you think the equivalent would be today? Or perhaps Jesus Christ, the Lord Jesus, going to Mecca, surrounded by tens of thousands of pilgrims and declaring everything you are hoping to achieve is to be found in me.

[19:51] Or perhaps the Lord Jesus going to the Vatican, to St. Peter's in Rome, standing in front of vast crowds and saying everything you are hoping to achieve from your religion is to be found in me.

Or perhaps the Lord Jesus going to Canary Wharf, standing in the heart of London's banking district and declaring everything you are striving for, everything you are longing for, the true purpose for which you are created is to be found in me.

Is that not staggering? Now it seems most likely that is why Luke includes verses 6 to 11. Just have a look at verse 6.

On another Sabbath, so again we're on the Sabbath, he entered the synagogue and was teaching and a man was there whose right hand was withered. And the scribes and the Pharisees watched him to see whether he would heal on the Sabbath.

So they might find reason to accuse him. This man, he's a visual aid. His right hand is withered. In all probability, here is someone who cannot work in a society with no welfare state.

[21:03] His life is ruined. But Jesus came to restore life. And so imagine the drama as verse 8, Jesus pulls the man center stage in front of the crowds and then verse 9, Jesus says to them, I ask you, is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or destroy it?

And after looking around at them, he said to them, stretch out your hand. And he did so, and his hand was restored. It is a glimpse, just a glimpse, of the new creation as the man's hand is

restored, as he is then restored to purposeful, meaningful life.

And yet, the religious establishments are furious. Verse 11, they were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus.

The story is told of a beautiful eagle, captured and tethered as a tourist attraction. And for years, the eagle walked round and round and round its tether until a rut was formed in the ground as it walked round and round and round.

And then the eagle had a new owner. The old owner died, had a new owner, who decided to release it. And quite a crowd gathered for that great day to watch the eagle soar majestically enjoying its newfound freedom.

[22 : 42] The owner removed the tether and the eagle walked round and round and round in the circle as it always had done on its rut.

As if it was saying to itself, verse 39, the old is good, the old is good. God will give us two compelling reasons to try the new.

Firstly, because Jesus Christ is the bridegroom come to bring forgiveness of sins and deliverance from judgment. Secondly, because Jesus Christ is the Lord of the Sabbath, the one who restores us to our original creation purpose so that we might belong to God as his people in his perfect new creation in heaven itself.

Let me finish with three implications. Three implications, I guess, for three different types of people. First of all, for the religious. Just as the painting iceberg needs to be rediscovered, there may be some of us who we need to rediscover the Lord Jesus Christ.

Perhaps you have a small view of Jesus. Perhaps you see him as insignificant, of little value, at best just at the very fringe of your life. Perhaps you are just beginning to get a slightly bigger view of Jesus.

[24 : 10] You are just beginning to have a little window on the enormity and huge significance of who Jesus Christ is. Remember Levi the tax collector, how Jesus says to him, chapter 5, verse 27, follow me, and he leaves everything and follows him.

Well, that is now you see what Jesus says to these religious people, leave your religion behind and follow me. Now, like Levi, we may not be religious, but you may know you are far from God just as he did.

Will you follow Jesus? But you may be religious, in which case Jesus says to us exactly the same thing. will you follow him?

Everything you are looking for in your religion is to be found in Jesus. Secondly, an implication for the embattled.

Look again at verse 39. And no one after drinking old wine desires new, for he says the old is good. Now, verse 39 is unique to Luke. The other gospel writers who include this question about fasting, they stop interesting at the end of verse 38.

[25 : 25] Throughout Luke's gospel, Luke seems to show particular interest in opposition to Jesus, both the fact of opposition and why the opposition comes. No doubt, in part, because he had travelled with the apostle Paul, we see that at the end of Acts, he'd witnessed first-hand opposition from the political and religious Jewish and Roman establishments.

It may be that Theophilus, to whom Luke wrote his gospel, was unnerved by the extent of opposition in the first century from the establishment to the claims of Jesus Christ.

Just as there will be those of us this morning who we are embattled as followers of Jesus, at school, at work, within our families, with friends. And I take it the point of verse 39 is simple.

It is that that is to be expected. Perhaps someone with a religious belief system or someone who is a churchgoer, perhaps they hear the words of Jesus, they hear the gospel, and how do they respond?

Thank you, but I'll stick with what I have. We should expect responses like that, and especially from the religious. I think the contrast between the religious here and Levi, so very unreligious, is very striking.

[26 : 45] the joy with which Levi follows Jesus could not be more striking. Third implication, for those who are joyless, those who have lost their joy as disciples of the Lord Jesus.

Perhaps you look back in great excitement to the day when you became a Christian, or perhaps the day when you were baptized, the day when you began the Christian life. It may just be the passage of time, it may be the busyness of life, or there may be particular circumstances that you are facing

at the moment.

And actually, as you look in your heart, you know that you are joyless as a Christian. In which case, this would be a wonderful passage, wouldn't it, to spend time in later on today, or during the week to meditate upon it, to digest it, to treasure who Jesus Christ is, to treasure why he's come, to bridegroom, to rescue his people from sin and judgments.

The Lord of the Sabbath who came, such that we might be restored to our original creation purpose, knowing God, serving God, a great eternity in the new creation.

Well, why don't we have a few moments for reflection, and I will then lead us in prayer. prayer. The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.

[28 : 16] Heavenly Father, we thank you for this wonderful way in which the Lord Jesus Christ constantly challenges us to consider who he is, the bridegroom, the Lord of the Sabbath.

We're sorry when we have a small view of him, when we fail to value who he is and why he came. And we pray, Heavenly Father, we would be those who would delight and rejoice in the forgiveness of sins that he came to bring, and would delight and rejoice in being restored to our true purpose as your creatures, serving you, longing to be with you in the new creation. and we ask it for Jesus' sake. Amen.