

Jesus, the ultimate game changer

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[0 : 00] Well, many of you, I'm sure, have heard of the word game changer. It describes someone or something intervening in a game and then totally changing its result.

So an unpassed decision in cricket, which swings the momentum a team's way, and then leading to victory when defeat was certain. Or the last minute substitute onto the soccer field, who then scores the winning goal.

He's a game changer. Many thought that Federer's medical timeouts this year, I don't know whether you're following, in the Oz Open were game changers. So in his semifinal, Federer was playing Warrinka, and he used a medical timeout, which I don't think he's ever used before, when the match was locked after four sets at 2-all.

And what had happened was that it swung the momentum back his way in giving him the match. And then he did it again in the final with Nadal, again calling a timeout. He got out at the end of the fourth set, and then as we know, the rest is history.

He goes on to win his 18th Grand Slam. Now the word, of course, is also used in other fields as well, like in commerce. So for example, they say the invention of the iPod or the iTunes is a game changer for the music industry, because it totally changed the way people paid for music.

[1 : 23] Well, tonight we're going to meet in Jesus the ultimate game changer. Actually, it's probably better to call him the ultimate life changer, because that's what his coming does.

He's changed the course of history, and he changes the life of everyone who puts their trust in him. Now Jesus pretty much made this claim himself. So if you remember in chapter 4, he quoted Isaiah 61, and he proclaimed himself as God's anointed, who'd come to preach the good news to the poor, to set the captives free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

And then he performed miracles to authenticate that message. And then afterwards, in the last two or three weeks that we've been looking, Luke begins to reveal what this good news is. That Jesus was calling people to repentance, so that they can enter God's kingdom through forgiveness of their sin.

So this week, by responding to the Pharisees' question, Jesus continues to expound the life-changing nature of his kingdom. Now recall what's just happened from last week.

Jesus was eating with the sinners, and it made the Pharisees unhappy. They think for a start that if Jesus was God's holy person, then he should be eating with them, not the sinners.

[2 : 45] They, not the tax collectors, were the righteous ones. They were the ones who knew and practiced the law. Furthermore, if Jesus claims to be calling sinners to repentance, as he says in verse 32, then why aren't his disciples fasting and praying and mourning over their sins?

That's what repentance looks like. Why are they feasting and drinking instead? And so that's their point in verse 33, if you look at that with me. It says, John's disciples, they say, John's disciples often fast and pray, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours go on eating and drinking.

Now, as is usually the case, the Pharisees always say things that have a kernel of truth. So, if you read the Old Testament, there are examples of fasting.

Nehemiah and Esther fasted when they were praying for the plight of their people. So too did the people of Nineveh, when Jonah called them to repentance. And these were all positive examples of what it means to fast.

Next month at camp, when we look at Joel's prophecy, we will see God himself call for repentance through fasting. So, the verse is up on the screen, Joel chapter 2 and verse 12, So, there is a place for fasting.

[4 : 12] The Pharisees were right. And John the Baptist was right to call his disciples to it. John himself lived a pretty austere life in the desert. But what the Pharisees didn't get is that Jesus' coming changes all that.

Because his coming is what people have been waiting for all this while. The Messiah is here, so preparation now gives way to celebration.

There's feasting instead of fasting. But of course, the Pharisees couldn't see this because they didn't recognize who Jesus is, God's Messiah.

Or to use Jesus' own analogy, he was the bridegroom that has come. See how Jesus answered them? He answers them in verse 34, Can you make the friends or guests of the bridegroom fast while he is there or he is with them?

Now, just like today, weddings were big things in those days. So big that often, celebrations would last for seven days. Now, if we did that today, I think most wedding couples would probably go broke.

[5 : 24] But anyhow, so great were these celebrations that the rabbis actually acknowledged them by issuing a ruling that exempted guests from fasting during this wedding.

So, the common practice is to fast twice a week, but if you're at a wedding, then you didn't need to fast. And so, Jesus is saying that even if you, the Pharisees, broke fast for the bridegroom of a wedding, then how much more when the King, when the Messiah is present?

Jesus' coming is bigger than a marriage because he's come to save them. He's come to free them from oppression. No, the disciples had to rejoice at this life-changing event.

This was history in the making. Now, the Pharisees failed to see this, right, as I said, because why? They thought they were the righteous ones. They didn't think they had a need of a Savior.

And for them, fasting did not result in humble repentance as it should. rather, fasting, when they fasted, they thought that that made them more deserving before God.

[6 : 43] Fasting was meant to remind you of your poverty, of your own sin and pride, that you were unworthy to come before God. But for the Pharisees, no, it was a badge of honor, a show of how righteous they were.

And that's why they took offense, didn't they, when Jesus ate, not with them, but with the sinners. So Jesus wasn't saying that there's no place for fasting. He's just saying it's not appropriate when He is with them, when the King is with them.

So He actually goes on to say now that there will come a time when the disciples will fast, verse 35, when they will respond in humble repentance. So look there, verse 35, Jesus says, but the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, in those days they will fast.

Now, Jesus is referring, of course, to His death. Then He'll be taken from them and hung on a cross. And in those days, the disciples will mourn Him. First, because like lost sheep, they would have lost their leader, but also for their own part in putting Jesus on the cross.

If you remember, Peter himself wept because he denied Jesus. But the others too, they doubted Him, they deserted Him. They were mourning their own sin.

[8 : 06] Now, I don't think the Bible actually then says whether they actually fasted from food, but it was certainly a time of humble repentance, of contrition, of waiting on God again.

Although at that time, you know, they didn't know whether Jesus would return. So Jesus' coming, therefore, brings two responses to the kingdom. And they're actually two sides of the same coin.

First, we are to respond in humble repentance because we see our own sinfulness, because we see our own inability to save ourselves. But we also respond in rejoicing.

We rejoice at the coming of the only one who can save us. We rejoice because we no longer need to earn our way into God's kingdom. We simply trust in Jesus' work on the cross.

Now, many of you would know that Lent has just begun. That was on Wednesday. And as Dietrich was saying, if you didn't know what Lent was, it's that period of 40 days leading up to Easter.

[9 : 10] So just like Advent leads up to Christmas, so Lent leads up to Easter. And some Christians use it as a time of fasting in preparation for Easter, while others, well, don't observe Lent at all.

And so the question that gets asked year in, year out, is this. Should Christians observe Lent or not? And if they do, what should they give up? Meat, chocolate, coffee, as Dietrich will, TV, or Facebook?

Well, we can see from our passage tonight, I think it shows us that we actually don't have to observe Lent. It's not compulsory. Jesus is with us by His Spirit. The Bridegroom is with us.

And so we can feast and we can rejoice in that. And yet, although that's true, I think we must also give room for humble repentance. So even though it's not compulsory, we can observe a fast during Lent.

If it helps us, if it helps us, to focus on sin and idols in our lives. If you haven't faced up to sin, your own sinfulness for a while, then using Lent to help you might be a good thing.

[10 : 23] So for instance, if you're struggling with your addiction to computer games, which leaves you no time for study or sleep, then why not give it up for Lent and use the time to pray or to study the Bible or just to study?

Or if your problem is consumerism, that is, you always have to buy new stuff or clothes to project a cool image of yourself, then why not go on a shopping fast and give the money to missions instead?

And why not not just give it up for Lent, but why not give it up forever, even after Easter? Because that would be a true mark of repentance, wouldn't it?

Now I know some of you do things like give up chocolate or coffee as teacher, I'm not having a go at him, but I have to say that that almost trivializes the seriousness of sin. It's almost saying that Jesus died to save us from our coffee addiction.

I mean, it's just my opinion, but I think it makes light of what true repentance is. Instead, I think it's a time to really focus on the things that grip us, the sin that really, truly grip us.

[11 : 41] And to give it up, to repent and to give that up. But remember, whatever we do, don't be like the Pharisees. Don't think that fasting makes us more righteous, more deserving of God's favor.

Because that's the exact opposite of what fasting or Lent is for. Instead, if you want to fast, make sure it results in true repentance. And make sure it's accompanied by true rejoicing.

as we remember that it's only Jesus, the Messiah, who brings us into God's kingdom. Just like last week with Levi, we feast because we're forgiven.

Someone at Morning Church last Sunday shared just that, of her joy at knowing God's forgiveness. She became a Christian as an adult, and although she wasn't a bad person, she shared that she still needed forgiveness from years of accumulated sin.

Nothing, you know, major or serious, but just silly things that you do as a teenager, foolish choices you make as a young adult. But all that guilt was lifted from her the moment she became a Christian.

[12 : 50] She experienced the true joy of God's forgiveness. And that's the same with each of us. Don't think you must be a better person before God will accept you.

Or you have to right all your wrongs for Him to love you. No, it's not what you do but what Jesus has done. All we need to do is repent and rejoice in Him.

He, not us, is the ultimate life changer. Well, let's go to the second point on the outline where having changed how we respond to His kingdom, Jesus also changes the way we live in His kingdom.

And Jesus shows how by telling a parable in verse 36. In it, He uses two images, one of garments and the other of wineskins. So look with me at verse 36.

I'm going to read it for you. Jesus says, 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 one will not match the old.

[13 : 53] 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.

Now, when someone becomes a Christian, sometimes, how they then try to live is to fit Jesus into their existing lives.

Fit Him in along with all the other stuff that's already there. So let me try and illustrate this. I'm going to get Dietrich to come up to help me. He's going to hold this flimsy bag of mine.

If you stand over here, please. this symbolizes my life before Christ. Okay? I know it says KPMG, but actually it's not. It's Mark Chu. And within it, I fill it with many things in my life.

So, my Surface Pro. Okay. That symbolizes my work aspirations. All right? This is my life. Thank you. Next, my family photo.

[14 : 56] Cute, aren't they? That's my... Yeah, whatever. That's a symbol of my desires for my family.

Okay? So it goes into my life. Yep. Okay, the third thing is my runners. That's my commitment to exercise. Yes. And leisure.

And all that I post on Facebook. I was going to use my bathers, but I'm glad you didn't. You didn't see that. Now, I could add more, but you get my point, don't you?

Okay. Even though I believe in Jesus, I still have a lot of pre-existing values, beliefs, commitments that I bring to my Christian life. And if this bag now symbolizes Jesus, I know it says Essex, but it's Jesus, what we then try and do is we try and shove this bag into our life.

Okay? Okay, maybe one or two things need to come out. You know, bad habits like my swearing and my clubbing lifestyle. You don't know anything about me.

[16 : 05] But the rest, you know, the rest, we can still keep in there. Thanks, Dietrich. Just leave it here. That's what we try to do, don't we? But if you hear Jesus' words and you read that verse, it's not possible, is it?

Actually, Jesus first says it's illogical. You see, when you're wearing an old torn garment and you're given a new one by someone, would you tear a patch out of the new one to try and mend your old one?

You wouldn't, would you? Why ruin a new shirt just to patch up an old one? Besides, it doesn't match. Instead, we'll toss out the old one, right, and just wear the new one.

It's the same with Christianity. All those laws and rules which the Pharisees had, thinking it gets them to God, well, Jesus says that doesn't work. So, why are they trying to fit Jesus into those things, into his teachings, into their value system?

But it's also impossible, Jesus says, because following Jesus requires that we embrace all that he offers. If you don't do that, like my bag, if I could keep trying shoving in, something will give, which is where the wineskin analogy comes from.

[17 : 24] Wineskin, which often is made from gold, is strong and elastic when new, and so they will expand without cracking when you pour new wine in and it starts to ferment. But once it's old, it's had wine in it already, it becomes brittle and inflexible, and it will burst when you pour more new wine in.

And so it is with living in God's kingdom, Jesus King. Jesus is the ultimate life changer. His coming ushers a whole new way of living. So for example, we live by faith and not by works anymore.

There's no need to impress him in order for God to love us. Where one's money and influence gives us security, well, it's Jesus himself who now gives us security, not just in this life, but for eternity.

But to trust Jesus wholeheartedly also means allowing him to be our ruler. That's what it means to be in his kingdom. He's the king, and he's got to be king of his kingdom, including us.

Only then will we enjoy his peace and joy. So if you come back to my bag, what we need to do is actually to entrust everything that we've got into his hands, into his bag.

[18 : 47] So our hopes, our dreams, whatever they may be, maybe forget about the exercise, all that shapes our priorities needs to go into his bag.

We put ourselves in his bag rather than try and fit him into ours. We allow God's word to shape us, our priorities and values, rather than try and fit his teaching into our value system.

If we don't, then something will give. Sooner or later, like the Pharisees witnessed, that wineskin of our lives will burst. And I think, I have to be honest here, I think some of you are trying to do just that.

You want to have it both ways. You want to follow Jesus, and yet you want to chase down your own dreams, your career, your studies. You haven't really submitted your ambitions to God.

And as a result, it shows. You're running around anxious all the time, you're trying to juggle work, your social life, and then giving what's left to God.

[19 : 59] Well, if that's how you live, eventually, something will give. You can't hold it together because you're not God. But also because God wouldn't allow you to do that.

God wants all of you. He doesn't want bits and pieces of you. That's why in both Simon and Levi's case, if you remember a few weeks ago, when Jesus called them, what did they do?

They left everything to follow him. And let me repeat Jesus' words again from Luke chapter 14 and 27. I repeated it. I had it two weeks ago. Whoever does not carry their cross, that is, whoever does not deny themselves and follow me cannot be my disciple.

It does not say may not be my disciple. It says cannot be my disciple. So friends, are you letting God set your agenda in life?

Is he shaping your desires and your priorities and directing your actions and your choices? That's why I was very encouraged. I think it was last year when I heard that one of you, when you were about to graduate, you decided not to apply for any and every job that was out there.

[21 : 10] Even though that's what everyone does, right? You get to final year of uni, whatever jobs there are, you just go for it. Instead, you told me that since your priority was to have time for God, you'll bypass all those jobs with long hours and only apply for the one that had sensible hours.

Sure, probably paid less, probably less prestigious, but that's the one that you wanted to go for and happily, you got the job. Now, I'm not saying that that's how it's like for everyone else, and that if you did this, God will always give you that job that you went for, but what I'm trying to commend is the process of thinking through what God wants of you, what those priorities ought to be, and then making your choices accordingly.

Being Jesus' disciple changes the way you live in his kingdom. It must do. And then when we live like that, what Jesus also changes is our desire for his kingdom, and that's my final point.

Once we've tasted his goodness, we will never think of going back. So Jesus says in verse 39, no one after drinking all one wants the new, for they say the old is better.

Now, it's easy to get confused here because of what we've just read, so we think that because the new wine there in the few verses before refers to Jesus, then the old wine must be Judaism, which Jesus replaces, in which case, why is Jesus now saying the old wine is better?

[22 : 40] Well, I think the way to understand it instead is to realize that Jesus is actually making a new point here. He's using the same imagery, but the old wine here, in this last verse, is different to the old wine previously.

Actually, the focus previously was on the wineskins, not the wine. Old wineskins represented the Pharisaic way of thinking, legalistic, brittle, inflexible.

But here, the focus is on the wine's quality. The old wine represents Jesus' new kingdom. But don't focus on the fact that it's old, focus on the fact that it's better wine.

And if you appreciate wine, some of you might, I don't, then you would know that good wine gets better with age. Once you've tasted old wine, good old wine, you'll wait and not drink the new wine too soon.

You want it to age so that it gets better. Same thing with coffee. Once you've had espresso coffee, you don't really want to go back to instant coffee. Or with my daughters, sorry Emma, when they've tasted that roasted Wagyu beef, which you can get in slices at Woolley's Deli, here's a plot for you Vijay, ham's no longer good enough, right, in their sandwiches, they always want to have that roasted Wagyu beef.

[24 : 04] Well, so it is for Jesus and his kingdom. And I'm not saying life will always be rosy as a Christian, but when you've truly tasted his goodness and grace, the assurance of his promises, how he gives you strength for your trials, how he loves you in spite of your faults, then why would you return to that old way of living where you have to prove yourself to God all the time?

It's like in that Old Testament reading we had in Isaiah 55, the first one. Having accepted God's invitation to buy and eat, it's up on the screen, and doing so without money or paying, having tasted its goodness in verse 2, and delighted in the riches of fare, why would you spend money that is on things that are not bread and things that will not satisfy?

You wouldn't do it, would you? do it. And I myself, I think, I can personally testify to this. When I was 21, and I started reading the Bible evidently, God was really good to me at that time, God's word really came alive to me then.

Suddenly, the world made sense. His way of living made sense. Now, I'm not perfectly obedient to God by any means, but every time I come across other ways of living, you know, the type of stuff you see on Oprah, I'm sure none of you watch Oprah, it's in the middle of the day, anyway, or you see those books in the self-help section, you know, they tell you how it's all about believing in yourself, you know, finding the real you.

There's no attraction for me in any of those things, because I've tasted what's good. Why would I want to go back to this stuff? It doesn't work anyway. All it does is puff you up, and it's something that's not true.

[25 : 49] Having chosen what is best in Jesus, why bother with anything else? So, friends, once we've understood the way into God's kingdom, that it's through humble repentance and rejoicing, and once we give ourselves fully to living his way, and once we've tasted the real joy and peace that comes from it, then, friends, I'll assure you that you wouldn't want to go back to the old ways.

all you want to do is to keep following Jesus and having him as life's ultimate game changer.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you that in Christ, in his coming, the new has arrived.

Your kingdom, your glorious kingdom has arrived, and even though we don't see in its full glory, it's hidden to a certain extent, and yet, to those that you love, and to those that you revealed your great glorious truth, we can see it, and we can taste it.

By your spirit, we have a foretaste of what life is like. So, Father, help us, once we've come into your kingdom, once we've lived and tasted how good you are, to persevere in it.

[27 : 09] Not to look back, not to look at Naskins and other things across the fence, not to look at others and so-called, see them having more success, more riches, more things in life.

Help us to see that as empty things, and see in you, in your son, the real thing. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.