

The Nonconformist

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[0 : 00] When we get to this section of Mark's gospel here, all the way through chapter 2 and the first part of chapter 3, we see Jesus as somewhat of a non-conformist.

It's a collection of narratives of various conflicts that Jesus had with the religious establishment of first century Judaism. And it reveals their hatred of him on the basis of his refusal to follow their guidelines, their traditions, their statements of law, this man-made law.

They couldn't stand Jesus because he didn't conform to what they thought that he should conform to as far as their religious practices were concerned. And so we saw last week in verses 13 through 17, Jesus has already gone against a social custom.

He has befriended and associated himself with publicans and sinners, which blew their minds. And now we get to this passage and there's just another layer of this that comes to the surface, another layer of Jesus' non-conformity.

And as we go through it, we will see how this plays out with a gospel purpose. This passage records a miniature question and answer session with Jesus.

[1 : 21] After he has just had this time of celebration and feasting with Matthew and Matthew's sinner friends, this group comes to him with a question.

And the passage illustrates for us this head-on collision between the gospel of grace and performance-driven, performance-based religion.

My purpose today in coming to this study and to this sermon is to examine the legalism that is behind this question and then glory in the gospel answer that Jesus responds with.

There's a simple breakdown of how we're going to look at this passage today. We're going to look at the question of fasting and then we're going to see Jesus' gospel answer. And of course, there'll be a few subheadings underneath that if you are following along in those scripture journals.

The first thing that we see, obviously, is a question of fasting. Look with me again at verse 18. And the disciples of John and the Pharisees used to fast. And they came and said unto him, Why do the disciples of John and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?

[2 : 34] Jesus was being questioned here by a group of people that could no longer ignore the undeniable difference that existed between him and other religious groups.

Now, Luke records for us in Luke chapter 5, verses 33 to 39. That's Luke's reference to this account. His account tells us, or at least insinuates, that it was a group of Pharisees that specifically asked Jesus this question.

Matthew's account, you can find that in Matthew chapter 9, verses 14 to 17. Matthew's account states specifically that it was the disciples of John the Baptist that came and asked this question.

Mark doesn't identify either one of those groups as the ones asking the question. He just says that they used to fast and then a group came and asked Jesus. Now, if you're like me, the flags go up.

Every time that happens, when you're looking at the synoptic gospels especially, and then sometimes you can lump John in with that in some places, and you see, why did Luke insinuate this?

[3 : 40] And then Matthew says this other thing explicitly. And if you're not careful, you might come to believe that there's some contradiction in the scripture. There's no contradiction here. Both groups are named.

It's easy to see this is a combination of those who have been influenced by the Pharisees and those who have been influenced by John the Baptist. There's no need to worry about a potential contradiction.

It's easy to see the combination here. Now, the question that they posed was very specific. And it had to do with the fact that Jesus and his disciples did not regularly fast.

Now, we know that Jesus did fast at times. He's already been in the Gospel of Mark. We've already seen he'd gone through a 40-day fast himself. But they did not regularly fast in the same way that these other groups did.

Now, it's possible that there was a measure of sincerity in the hearts of those who were asking this question. But the context reveals plainly that it came primarily from a spirit of condemnation.

[4 : 46] There's not really much sincerity that we can draw from this passage. After all, this entire section of Mark's Gospel is recording for us and telling us about these different conflicts that Jesus had with these religious groups.

And when we come to this one, it's possible we could read in some sincerity. But the reality is they were just offended. They were bothered by what Jesus was doing.

Or rather, what he was not doing in this case. Now, the Pharisees are always described as enemies of Jesus. So there's really no wonder in our minds that they would be included in this particular conflict.

It does, however, come as a bit of a surprise that the disciples of John the Baptist would be lumped in with those who were typically enemies of Jesus and Jesus' critics.

And we know that John was a believer. He was a faithful believer. He faithfully pointed his students to Jesus. In fact, you go to the Gospel of John right in the beginning. The whole reason that Peter and Andrew and James and John are following Jesus or at least know who he is is because John the Baptist, Andrew was following him.

[6 : 02] Jesus comes by in Galilee. John says, Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. And Andrew immediately turns away from John the Baptist and begins to follow Jesus. John was a faithful believer.

He faithfully pointed people to follow Jesus. But clearly, not all of John's followers, not all of his students transferred their allegiance from John to Jesus.

In fact, some of them, it seems, might have even gravitated toward the religious establishment instead. Because it's not just John's disciples coming here.

They're coming along with some of the Pharisees. And then we see later on in the book of Acts, Acts chapter 19, the first seven verses there. There was another group of John's disciples whom Paul confronted, whom years and years and years after the death and resurrection and ascension of Jesus still had not been converted to Christ until that moment.

So just because they were disciples of John didn't mean that they were believers and followers of Jesus. Now, though the men were in very different religious camps, there was a common denominator in this group.

[7 : 11] The common denominator here, the thing that brought them together, was that they both held to a subscription to performance-based religion.

They believed that they could earn a right standing with God on the basis of their particularly pious lives and pious behavior.

And they developed a system of elaborate rules and regulations that they not only imposed upon themselves, but they imposed upon others as well.

Like many people today, they believed, and their practice reflected a belief, a false belief, that a good God who loves people will reward those who do their best and try their hardest.

Even if they wouldn't have articulated it in that way, their practice reflected this false notion that a good God, if he exists, will reward those who do their best and try their hardest.

[8 : 20] But the Bible teaches clearly that it is utterly impossible for one to be good enough, to find a right standing with God on the basis of your goodness.

Consider Romans 3. This is a passage we go to often in this discussion. Paul quotes the Old Testament. He says, And then he goes on later in the passage in verse 23, and he says, In other words, the best that you can do still falls short.

That nobody truly, in and of themselves, without the Holy Spirit's work beginning to work in their hearts, nobody truly seeks God, nobody truly seeks righteousness apart from his work taking place in their hearts.

It just isn't possible. Isaiah said this, in Isaiah 64, 6, We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteousness is as a polluted garment, or filthy rags, as we quote that often.

What was he getting at there? Even the best that you can do is not good enough. The best that you can do, compared to God's standard, is a filthy rag.

[9 : 52] You're still unclean. You can't be good enough. But the disciples of John, at least this group of disciples, and the Pharisees, their practice was to live in such a way that if God really is good, and if God really is loving, then he will reward me based on the best efforts that I can possibly give him.

And it was this false notion that actually caused them to reject the gospel of grace and the gospel of Christ's mercy. It produced their confusion and frustration with Jesus.

They just couldn't understand why he didn't conform to their traditions. And they believed that his lack of conformity actually diminished his credibility.

In fact, they essentially said, how could this man be from God if he does not do what we do and act like we act?

You ever heard somebody say something similar to that before? Or maybe that's the question in their mind. How can this person possibly be right with God if they don't do the things that I do? If they don't act the way that I act?

[10 : 57] If they don't believe in the same way that I believe, not in relation to the gospel, but in the way that they live out their life and the safeguards and the guardrails and all the things that they do? And we start to question, well, this person isn't like me.

Therefore, they cannot be from God. That's exactly where these men are. How could Jesus be from God if he doesn't do what we do? If he doesn't follow the conformity to our rules the way that we do?

We have a word for that. We'll call it legalism. It's just as common today among Christians as it was in first century Judaism. And there's three marks of this legalism here just in verse 18.

Three marks that we all need to recognize I'm just going to mention them quickly and we'll move on, okay? The first one is this, custom. Custom is this first mark. Look again at verse 18.

Now, John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. What is that? It's a custom. It's a tradition. Nothing wrong with customs. Nothing wrong with traditions.

[11 : 56] But in this case, their tradition was elevated above truth. The placement of this story in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, all of them put it directly after Jesus's celebratory feasting at Matthew's house.

The picture is this, that at the same time that Jesus and his disciples were having this grand feast with a publican, these men were probably on a day of their ritualistic fast.

And so as they see Jesus, they just don't understand. What prompted this was Jesus to them, his odd behavior. Instead of fasting like them, he's feasting. It's not just that he's eating, he's feasting.

He's celebrating. Why would he do that? And their question wasn't so much out of curiosity as it was a fence. When they saw Jesus eating with publicans and sinners, they were offended first that he would associate with such vile people because they would never do that.

But on top of that, not only is he associating with people that we wouldn't associate with, but he's doing something that we don't do. They are offended that he wouldn't conform to their tradition. Jesus was not refusing to conform to something that the Old Testament actually said to do.

[13 : 14] Nowhere in the Old Testament did God command the people to fast in the way that these men were fasting. There was only one requirement for fasting.

It was on the day of atonement. You can read about that in Leviticus 16, actually, if you wanna write that in your margins, Leviticus 16, 29 and 31. There were other times of fasting recorded in the Old Testament, but these were always voluntary and they always related to unique seasons and unique circumstances.

The same thing in the New Testament. You get to the New Testament, it's not that fasting isn't there. It is there, but it's voluntary and it's always for unique purposes and unique seasons of mourning and of grief.

Jesus is not violating the Old Testament here. What he's violating is the traditions that had been added to God's law. The Pharisees had developed over the course of just a couple of hundred years before Jesus.

They had developed these systems of regulations and a part of that was that those who were truly righteous, those who were real serious about following God, fasted weekly on Monday and Thursday.

[14 : 27] So it wasn't just about the day of atonement. What they're offended at here is that Jesus isn't fasting on Monday and Thursday in the way that they fasted. It wasn't about breaking God's law.

It was about breaking their law. Legalism always does this. It always elevates tradition above truth and it requires adherence to man's law in order to truly be righteous.

And Jesus constantly confronted this. We're gonna come back to this in Mark chapter seven. Mark seven, six through eight, Jesus said this. He was talking to the Pharisees. Well, did Isaiah the prophet prophesy of you hypocrites?

He says, as it is written, the people honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. In vain they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.

You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men. Jesus was constantly confronting this. It's not that he was breaking God's law. He was breaking their law and he constantly confronted this legalistic attitude.

[15 : 33] Sinclair Ferguson was helpful here. He wrote this about this particular passage. The real issue in such matters, he writes, is always what does God command us to do?

And to insist on such fasting as the Pharisees did was to go beyond the law of God. And to insist on what God has not insisted is to seek to outdo God with man-made traditions.

Catch that last phrase. To insist on something that God has not insisted on is to seek to outdo God with man-made traditions.

That's what these men were doing. So the first mark of legalism here, it is custom, tradition over truth. Secondly is comparison. And you'll see that these three subheadings build upon each other. There's some overlap.

So first there's custom. John and his disciples and Pharisee and their disciples, they had this tradition of fasting on Monday and Thursday. Comparison. Look again at the verse. The question is, why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?

[16 : 48] Did you notice the question? The question was not, why does God command us to fast and you do not fast? That wasn't the question.

The question is, why do we fast and you don't? At its heart is a self-righteous pattern of comparison.

It wasn't about obeying God. It was about obeying them. And Jesus confronted this all the time too. Remember his teaching on judgmentalism in Matthew chapter seven, that verse that we hear quoted all the time, often out of context.

And Jesus says, judge not that you be not judged. He was confronting a mindset, not that we shouldn't exercise discernment, because of course we should exercise discernment.

What Jesus was condemning was those who judge on the basis of man's standard rather than God's standard. Legalists always compare others to their standard of self-righteousness rather than what God has clearly stated in his word.

[17 : 58] That's what's happening here. Rather than examine their hearts in this moment, which is what they should have done, they insisted that something must be wrong with Jesus.

Never mind the fact that he has healed all these people. Never mind the fact that he speaks with such authority and power. Never mind the fact that we've seen him cast out demons.

Never mind all of these other things. Something must be seriously wrong with him. Why? Because he doesn't do what I do. He doesn't live like I live.

And there can't be a problem with me. There must be a problem with him. So there's comparison. There's custom. There's comparison. And then there's criticism.

This is just how it builds, right? We develop these traditions. And whenever we develop the traditions and put them above God's law, we end up living by comparison. Our righteousness is based on how we're out doing other people.

[18 : 55] And other people's unrighteousness is based on their comparison to me. And then that just naturally leads itself into criticism. We automatically look at everybody with us, around us with a critical eye and a judgmental spirit.

This was a passive-aggressive question. It was a statement of disapproval. This wasn't genuine curiosity. They weren't seeking understanding or an answer.

They were condemning Jesus. And that's how legalism always is. It's never gracious. It's always critical. They were essentially saying, if you want us to take you seriously, then you're going to have to do some improvements in the area of friendship and fasting.

It was always a critical eye. They criticized Jesus for not conforming to their system. And this ultimately led to their desire to have him killed. In fact, just skip ahead a little bit.

Chapter 3, verse 6. This is at the end of all of these conflicts. There's this building. We're going to get to it next week. There's this building taking place of frustration with Jesus, all on the basis of custom and tradition.

[20 : 02] And then he gets to verse 6 in chapter 3. And the Pharisees went forth and immediately took counsel with the Herodians, somebody that they hated anyways, and took counsel against Jesus, how they might what?

Destroy him. Kill him. Why did they want to kill him? Not because he was disobedient to God. Because he didn't conform to them. That's the issue that is beginning to unfold.

Alistair Begg said, nothing infuriates a legalist more than a person that won't obey their rules. And that's exactly what's happening with these men. Well, that's the question about fasting.

Let's move to the second half of this passage. And that is an answer about the gospel. An answer about the gospel. We find this in 19 through 22.

After being confronted by this legalistic question, Jesus really, what he's doing here, is responding with the truth of the gospel.

[21 : 04] And indeed, the gospel of Jesus is the answer to everything. It really is. It's the key to breaking the shackles, unlocking the shackles of performance-driven religion, which is nothing but a burden.

The gospel removes that burden. It offers salvation on the basis of God's gracious forgiveness, rather than demanding a perfection that's actually impossible to attain.

Ligon Duncan said, Ligon Duncan said, salvation is not something we earn by doing. It is something we receive by believing. That's the heart of the gospel.

If you hope to gain acceptance today on the basis of your efforts at being good, you'll be disappointed to discover that you can't actually be good enough.

That's a heavy burden. That's a burden that God does not put on your shoulders. That's a burden that comes with religion.

[22 : 13] It's a burden that comes with legalism, but that's not from God. God doesn't set that demand on you. He doesn't put acceptance and eternal life on the basis of how you perform.

The salvation that he proclaims in the scripture is much more freeing than that. It's one of repentance and faith in Christ.

I want you to think about this. Terry and I were talking just before the service about that book, Gentle and Lowly, and how helpful it is in wrapping our minds around the heart of Christ. You don't have to earn God's love.

You already have it. It is set on you. It's not something you have to earn. It's something you receive.

This salvation that God proclaims in the scripture is not something you have to work for. It's something that's freely offered. And you receive it by faith.

[23 : 19] Jesus gave this gospel answer with three illustrations. They're interesting. In that they're not real clear on the surface.

Now, you may be confused at this point. If you've read ahead and maybe you're staring at these verses and you're thinking, how in the world is the gospel here in these verses? And understand, we're going to have to do some digging to get at this, okay?

We're going to have to do some digging. But Jesus gives three illustrations. The first one has to do with the specific question of fasting. The last two address this idea of performance-driven religion in a more broad sense.

And so through these three illustrations, we see the gospel come forth in three ways. First, we see Jesus' divine identity.

We're going to mine this passage now. We're going to pull this out from the rubble here. We're going to see Jesus' divine identity. We're going to see his redemptive purpose. It's there.

[24 : 21] It's not abundantly clear on the surface. We're going to get to it, okay? We're going to see his divine identity, his redemptive purpose. And then we're going to see that the gospel of grace is totally incompatible with performance-driven religion, okay?

It's totally incompatible. We're going to get to those three things in these three illustrations. The first thing we see is Jesus' divine identity. Jesus' divine identity. Look with me at verse 19.

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.

I'm going to read it again. Think what Jesus is saying here in this illustration. Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as the bridegroom is with them, they cannot fast.

Jesus employs in this first illustration this wedding imagery, which is interesting. In that culture, it would have been interesting to attend a wedding. Weddings here in the United States today, the shorter the better, right?

[25 : 28] If you can get in and out in 15 minutes, that's a helpful wedding, at least for us fellas. That's how it works, right? The weddings in the first century Judaism didn't function that way. These were huge affairs.

They were community-wide. They lasted often for seven days. And given the joyous nature of the event, it would have been completely inappropriate for the wedding party to go through a season of fasting.

Can you imagine that? Fasting is representative and reflective of mourning and grief. That's what it is. It's what I'm setting aside this necessity of food in order to come to God begging for his work to be done in a particular way.

It's often reflected of mourning and of grief. Now, can you imagine? Maybe Julie's dad did this 12 years ago at our wedding. I don't know. Maybe he was fasting that day. Mourning and grief. Can you imagine the inappropriateness of the wedding party?

The best man and the maid of honor and the whole wedding party with them deciding, you know what? We know this is a great celebration. We've just taken on this mourning and grief and we're going to fast.

[26 : 36] We're not going to celebrate with you. That's essentially what Jesus is drawing their attention to. To fast during a wedding celebration was not only inappropriate, it was disrespectful.

It was offensive. Now, rabbinical teaching even released the people from religious affairs, other religious duties in order to enjoy the wedding celebration to the fullest.

Now, in Jesus's illustration, he is the bridegroom. And the disciples that are being asked about, they're fasting, the disciples are his wedding party.

This was not a time to mourn. This was a time to rejoice. This was a time to celebrate the fact that the Messiah had come.

The one that was bringing salvation was here. This wasn't a time for his disciples to mourn. It was a time for them to celebrate. But there's more than that here.

[27 : 36] Jesus was once again making a provocative statement of his own identity. And it wasn't just a statement of his messianic identity. This was a statement of his deity.

Let me explain. The Old Testament, with all of its imagery of the Messiah, never one time describes the Messiah, the coming messianic king, never describes him with this kind of imagery.

Never as a husband. Never as his people being a bride. That's never applied to the Messiah. But it is applied to someone in the Old Testament. Every time, it is given specifically to God himself.

Not to the Messiah. Now, here's why that's so awesome. Let me give you a couple of examples. There's a lot of them there. These two are just abundantly clear. The first one is Isaiah 54. Isaiah 54, 5 and 6.

Here's what God says through Isaiah. Listen. Your maker is your husband. Maker, capital M. Your creator is your husband.

[28 : 46] The Lord Jehovah, Yahweh. Yahweh is his name. And the Holy One of Israel, capital letters again, this is a reference to God, is your redeemer, the God of the whole earth, he is called.

For the Lord, Yahweh, has called you like a wife, deserted and grieved in spirit, like a wife of youth when she is cast off, says your God.

That's not the Messiah. That's God himself. And then we see it again in Hosea. In fact, the whole prophecy of Hosea is presenting this imagery between God and his people.

But in chapter 2 and verse 19, God says, I will betroth you to me forever. I will engage you to me. I will marry you. You will be mine forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy.

And all of this is brought together in this helpful statement. James Edwards wrote this. He said, Although a firm link between Messiah and bridegroom cannot be established, that does not exclude or diminish the Christological significance of this imagery in Jesus' answer.

[30 : 02] In this instance, it heightens it. For in the Old Testament, Israel's husband and lover is not the Messiah, but God. He said, why does this matter?

What does this mean? When Jesus says, he's the bridegroom, and those who follow him is his bride. They're his wedding guests.

When he says that he's the bridegroom, he's not saying only that he's Messiah. He's saying, I'm God. And as God, I am betrothing you to me. I am your redeemer.

I am your lover. His heart is set on you as your maker. How awesome is that? Now, these people wouldn't have understood.

They wouldn't have made that connection probably immediately in what Jesus was saying. They probably had some concern about him saying it. They might not have been able to make all those connections, but that's what Jesus is saying. This is his divine identity.

[30 : 59] This is the gospel. How could the disciples fast when Emmanuel is among them? God with us.

Then we see Jesus' redemptive purpose. That's in the next verse. Verse 20. Look at it with me. The day will come, Jesus says, when the bridegroom is taken away, snatched away, and then they will fast in that day.

What's that all about? This isn't a statement to after Jesus would ascend into heaven. That's not what he's talking about. This is a veiled statement of his coming death.

He's continuing this wedding imagery here, and he says that there would come a time when the disciples would indeed fast. Well, when will that be? None of the disciples would have grasped this.

Even after his resurrection, they still didn't quite grasp it. They still needed some help. But you need to think about, when is Mark writing this letter? He's writing it on the basis of what he's heard from Peter, and he's writing it well after Christ's crucifixion and resurrection and ascension.

- [32 : 13] He has the privilege in writing this like we have in reading it. We're looking back on Jesus' statements after the cross, after the resurrection, after the ascension. So we can discern here what Jesus is really saying.

The key words are taken away. Did you see it? The day will come when the bridegroom is taken away, snatched away. These words are rooted in Isaiah 53.

We read this passage for communion often. Here's what it says in verse 8. By oppression and judgment, he, the suffering servant, the Messiah, he was taken away.

How was he taken away? Stricken for the transgression of my people. What's he talking about? He's talking about the crucifixion. For three days between Jesus' arrest and his resurrection, what were the disciples doing?

I can guarantee you they weren't eating and feasting and celebrating. They were mourning. They were grieving. They were fasting. That's what Jesus is referencing here.

- [33 : 17] And what's he ultimately pointing these people to? His redemptive purpose. Why did Jesus come? Why does it matter that we recognize his divine identity?

Because that divine identity is purposeful in his incarnation. He came with a redemptive purpose. He would die for their sin.

It's the gospel. In other words, now think about this. Here's John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees. They're working hard. I mean, they are working hard.

Starving themselves. Two days a week. Hoping to gain some kind of acceptance. And then here comes Jesus and says, and he gives this veiled statement that, look, stop working so hard. I'm going to take care of it.

The sin you're trying to atone for in your good works. I'm going to pay the price for it. I'm going to take your place. That's the gospel. How awesome.

- [34 : 16] How awesome is that? You don't have to work for his love. His love's already been displayed. It's already set on you. Just receive it. Stop working. Their mourning in those three days would ultimately turn to celebration again.

Because Jesus wouldn't remain dead. Eternal life was secured for them when three days later, the resurrected Christ appeared before them.

And it once again becomes a celebration. A celebration that continues for us today, 2,000 years later. A celebration that will never, ever, ever end.

Jesus said as much. Mark 10. Verse 45. Even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve. And to do what? Give his life a ransom for many.

That's the gospel. So Jesus' divine identity. He's the bridegroom. This veiled statement of his redemptive purpose that there would come a time for them to fast. That is when he is crucified.

- [35 : 22] But that would only be temporary. And then there's the third part. We're finished. The incompatibility of the gospel. The incompatibility of the gospel. Specifically in this case with performance driven religion.

Look at verses 21 and 22. No one sews a piece of, I'm reading from the ESV here just because it's a little more clear. No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment.

If he does, the patch tears away from it. 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 the new wine is for fresh wineskins. What in the world is that about? That is a weird story to answer a question about fasting.

It is, isn't it? But we can figure it out. The last two illustrations are parables. They're parabolic statements that point to a single truth.

[36 : 29] And this truth that Jesus is summarizing in these two illustrations is this. The gospel of grace is incompatible with your religious traditions. Your works-based system of salvation.

It doesn't work. It doesn't work. It's incompatible with the true gospel of grace. Now let's talk about these illustrations quickly. The first one involves patching an old garment with a new piece of cloth.

In this case, an unshrunk piece of cloth. There's no synthetic materials in their day like there is now. So no one would take an old garment and put a new piece of unshrunk cloth as a patch on it.

Because when it's washed, it's going to shrink. And when it shrinks, it's just going to make a bigger hole. It's going to destroy the garment. No one takes an old wineskin and puts new wineskins in it.

These wineskins, they were animal hide. They were animal hide that was tanned. And then it was formatted in a certain way. And it had an elasticity to it. So when they would pour the wine in it, it would go through this fermentation process.

[37 : 32] And the wineskins would be able to contain it because of their elasticity. An old wineskin is weakened. It's brittle. It loses its elasticity. So no one would take new wine, fresh wine, and pour it in an old wineskin.

Because as the fermentation process begins to unfold, it builds up the pressure. And the elasticity is gone in the old one. And it explodes. It bursts. It can't contain it.

Okay? That's essential. These are the illustrations. Both of them involve something that is old and weak and brittle and tired.

Both of them are destroyed by something that is new and valuable. That's the point. And when we understand parables, for the most part, there's a couple of exceptions.

For the most part, a parable is getting across one point. There's one. So you don't have to read too much into this. We don't have to read too far into all of the different things. There's one point Jesus is making.

[38 : 31] He is the new wine. He is the unshrunk cloth. And his gospel of grace explodes the old, tired forms of performance-driven religion.

They're incompatible. He came to blow those things apart. His gospel of grace blows those mindsets apart. Sinclair Ferguson, again, says it this way.

The way of the Pharisees with their legalism and their man-made traditions and the way of the gospel of grace cannot be harmonized. They're mutually incompatible, he says.

Jesus' teaching on godly grace and forgiveness for sinners destroys the old cloth of the Pharisees. It bursts the old wineskins of their religion. Unfortunately, there are those that try to somehow mix the two together.

It's not even possible to do. Forgiveness and eternal life is not given to those who merely have Jesus as a piece of a puzzle. That's not the gospel.

[39 : 36] Eternal life and forgiveness is given to those who completely abandon all personal efforts and receive that gospel by faith. I'm going to close this way.

In Luke chapter 18, Jesus helpfully illustrates the difference between legalists, this performance-driven salvation, and the gospel of grace.

I'm just going to read it to you. You can write it down, actually, if you want. It's Luke 18, 9 through 15. If you want to turn there, I would be glad for you to do that. We're going to close with this, okay? Jesus also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and treated others with contempt.

Boy, is that not like the perfect summary of what a legalist is. They trust in themselves for righteousness, and they treat others with contempt. Just Jesus is good at this, isn't he? He has perfectly brought that summary together.

And here's the parable. Two men went into the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed this way.

[40 : 42] God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week.

I give tithes of all that I get. But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven. But he beat his breast, saying, God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

Jesus said, I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled.

But the one who humbles himself will be exalted. The question is, to which of those two characters do you most relate?

Are you the Pharisee? Self-righteous? Lord, I'm so glad that I'm not like these others. Or are you the penitent publican who just says, Lord, have mercy on me?

[41 : 58] That mercy is available. It's available through Christ alone. That's the whole point of the scripture. That's the whole point. The whole reason we gather today is to look at this book that tells us this gospel of mercy is available.

But it's only available through Christ. It's not available through your best efforts. Only through Christ. And he offers it freely to everyone who will come to him in faith.

Now, will you turn away from all of your best efforts? Will you abandon your self-righteousness? And will you just cast yourself on his mercy?

Jesus said, come unto me. All you who are weary and heavy laden. You're burdened. Why are you burdened? Because you're just trying hard.

You're doing your best. You're trying hard. There's no peace. You're never going to be good enough. That's a burden. Jesus says, all of you, if that's you, he says, come to me. Come to me and I will give you rest.

[43 : 05] I'll give you rest, Jesus says. How will he do that? Because I am gentle and lowly in heart. My burden is easy. It's light.

It's grace. You don't have to prove yourself to me. I already know you're messed up, Jesus says. It's okay. That's why I came. That's why I died.

Just believe him.