

I've shared this story before, but this is my first time here at Living Hope Church.

Many, many, many years ago I worked as a student pastor during my time in seminary. One of my responsibilities was working with youth and young adults. One story I'll never forget was interacting w/ a teenage couple who decided to get married. Axel & Bernie – Axel fancied himself a musician and liked to play the guitar.

One day we were talking about the upcoming wedding and he shared with me that he was going to play his guitar and sing a song. I said, "that sounds neat --- what song are you going to do?" He said, "Yesterday" by the Beatles. I thot to myself...

Yesterday, all my troubles seemed so far away
But now it seems as though they're here to stay
Oh I believe in yesterday.

[You can't make this stuff up]. I said, "why do you want to sing that song?" "Because I like it"

I told him it was pretty negative for a wedding, but when his wedding day came – he sang "Yesterday" [What can I say?]

It's a funny story, but it's also sad because it didn't fit the occasion. A wedding isn't supposed to be a sad/negative day.

It should be celebratory.

Jesus agrees in today's passage from Mark 2. This morning we're going to look at.....

The Question to Jesus about Fasting
Jesus' Counter Question/Answer
Jesus' New Teaching

So we begin with the question in [v. 18 \[read\]](#)

This is the first direct question to Jesus in chapter 2, which shows the controversy & opposition Jesus is beginning to face.

“Why don't your disciples fast like John's disciples and the Pharisees' disciples?”

We know from history that Pharisees at this time fasted on Mondays & Thursdays. We get a whiff of this in the story of *the Pharisee and the Tax Collector* in Luke's Gospel. There the Pharisee proudly prays - 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.'

Pharisees made up only 1% of the Jewish population but they were very influential in 1st century Judaism. In the OT there was only one required fast - **the Day of Atonement** [a 24 hour fast, once a year, to mourn sin and receive atonement]. In time, 5 other fasts were added and practiced. But the Pharisees took fasting to a whole new level [fasting on steroids – twice a week]. And it surely began with good intentions, but over time it became tainted w/ *spiritual pride* and even a sense of meriting God's salvation.

It reminds me of Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting. I witnessed it in person in the summer of 1985 in Amsterdam. I was working at a Christian Youth Hostel. At dusk I'd see the Muslim men gathering on the streets and getting ready to go to the restaurants after not eating [or drinking] during the day. **And why did they do this?** It's one of the 5 pillars of Islam. Disciplines that earn your way to heaven.

The Pharisees [within the context of Judaism] were prone to think themselves right with God because of their 3 pillars of practice – prayer, almsgiving & fasting.

Futhermore, they believed that their piety & righteousness

would one day usher in God's kingdom and the Messiah.

To a lesser degree, John's disciples prepared for God's kingdom and its Messianic King by fasting regularly.

The irony, of course, is that the king was now in their midst!

This brings us to Jesus' Counter Question and His answer to the question about His disciples not fasting. **It begins in v. 19 [read]**
And Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them?"

Have you ever attended a wedding?

Was it a time of solemnity or celebration?

Was it a time of fasting or feasting?

Jesus' counter-question gets to the point - a wedding celebration is an inappropriate time to fast [or play the song *Yesterday*]; it's a time to feast and celebrate the joyful union of the bride & the bridegroom.

In this case, Jesus associates himself with the bridegroom and his disciples with the wedding guests. In the Jewish culture the wedding celebration went on for 7 days and was filled w/ food and drink and joy.... Not fasting!

And what is Jesus' point? His point is that someone is present who makes fasting inappropriate// someone so important, someone bringing such good news that the only right thing to do is celebrate w/ great joy.

-When Levi leaves the tax booth to follow Jesus in the previous passage what happens? He hosts a feast for Jesus & His friends.

He celebrates being called to follow Jesus.

-Or think of Prodigal Son who returns home to his father. **What does the father do?** He puts the best robe on him and a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet... Then he says, "*bring the*

fattened calf and let us eat and celebrate”

Why? because his son was lost & dead in his sins, but now he was alive! So he throws a party! But what about the oldest son?
– he pouts.

The Father tries to reason with him that it’s not a time to pout.

And Jesus tries to reason with the Pharisees that it was not a time to fast because he [the Divine Bridegroom] is present.

It’s a time for feasting, not fasting. And he ups the ante by using this Bridegroom language. In the OT, God uses this language to describe His relationship with His people.

Betty read Is. 54 earlier – Is. 54:5[read] Here is Is. 62:5 [read]

So I think Jesus is saying, “I’m the Divine Bridegroom. I’m the divine husband.” The Son of God is here bringing the good news of God’s salvation and God’s kingdom – it’s a time to rejoice! It’s a time to embrace Him! It’s a time to marry yourself to

Christ with the salvation he offers!

I know someone who didn’t get married until his 30’s. But on his honeymoon he looked out over the ocean and told the Lord that he loved Him most of all. **Why?** Because Jesus is the Divine Bridegroom of every Christian. The church is His bride & He is to be our highest love!

Do you know Him? Do you love Him above all else?

Do you have the joy of the Lord?

**Knowing you Jesus, Knowing you, there is no greater thing
You’re my all, you’re the best, you’re my joy, my righteousness,
and I love your Lord.**

That said, there is a dark cloud on the horizon, and yet it is something that actually makes righteousness before God possible. **Do you see it there in v. 20?** It’s a shocker!

The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day.

Can you imagine being at a wedding reception and the bridegroom is taken away? The language is graphic. He's torn away. Which seems to be Jesus foreshadowing the time when he will be arrested, torn from his followers and crucified on a cross. The Bridegroom who gives his life for his bride.

Makes me think of those great words from Ephesians 5

Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

And how did He give himself up for her? He died on the cross for His church, for you and me. In that day they will fast. And that day continues today. The Bridegroom has risen & returned to heaven. Now, in His physical absence, we fast.

*We go without a meal or fast for a day or give something up for Lent. **Why?** To remember the suffering of Christ on the cross.*

This is why many Christians throughout church history have fasted on Good Friday. To remember the suffering of Christ w/ a little suffering on our own.

But along with that is an opportunity to tell God we love Him because He first loved us and sent His Son. "God, I love you more than breakfast and lunch." I love you by denying myself and each time I feel a hunger pain I look to you. I bow before you in my heart and I thank you for the truth of Jesus Christ

Another reason to fast is sorrow over sin coupled with repentance and seeking restoration.... [that's a great reason] In the book of Acts we see Paul worshiping and fasting/praying for guidance about future missions. Fasting intensifies our prayers, our seeking, our commitment.

But let's spend our last few minutes thinking about Jesus' words at the end of today's passage. These parables or illustrations

about His new teaching. [Look at vv. 21 & 22]

Let me focus on that second picture of the wine & wineskins. Old wineskins were worn, brittle, stiff. New wine fermenting inside would expand and burst the old wineskin. New wine needed a new wineskin [a new container] that allowed for the expansion of the wine.

Likewise, Jesus is telling the Pharisees that He and His teaching are new and expansive. They cannot be contained in the old containers & categories of Judaism & Traditions. He fulfills the law and then expands the truth of God's salvation & God's Kingdom & God's people to a whole new level. Basically Jesus blows up their religion box with its theology & practice.

He is greater than their concept of Messiah – He is the Divine Son of God & Son of Man who overcomes Satan, teaches with piercing authority, casts out demons, heals the sick, touches and heals a leper without himself becoming unclean, forgives the sins of a paralytic and then heals him, calls a low-life Jewish tax collector to follow Him, suspends the practice of fasting. **Boom!**

He was blowing their boxed-in minds!

In the next passage he claims to be the Lord of the Sabbath.

And He's just getting started. We're still in ch. 2!

In time we'll see He's the Suffering Servant, the Final Atonement, the Final Passover Lamb, The Bridegroom who gives His life for His bride, the Resurrected Lord. **[Boom!]**

But what about us? Do we have old wineskins that are brittle & stiff?

Do we have boxes that are sealed tight? The thinking goes like this-

Here's my **fasting box** – it's really small because I've never fasted, but I see that Jesus taught that fasting would resume, so maybe I'll give up something

for the rest of Lent. And as I do it will be a remembrance of Christ giving up His life for me. [And that will likely expand my **prayer box** as well]

And then there's a **relationship box**. It includes family and friends, but Jesus' encounter w/ the leper and Levi the tax collector are challenging me to get outside my church bubble w/ the gospel. to unbelievers, to neighbors, a kid who sits alone at lunchtime at my school, people outside my comfort zone.

Here's my **Music Box** – maybe it's a contemporary only box or a traditional only box and I pout if it's anything else. I have traditions and preferences ingrained in me, but Jesus pushes that envelope like he does w/ the Sabbath in the next passage. He opens and expands our paradigm of worship.

Maybe you'd say here's my **Salvation Box** – it's filled with my beliefs and one of them is that I'm a good, religious person so I think God will let me into heaven. But Jesus came preaching Good News that has to do with the forgiveness of sins [He came to serve and give His life as a ransom for many]

And that's expanding my **church box** because church for me is 10:30-11:45 on Sundays [or one Sunday a month because my church box is real optional]. But Jesus calls His disciples to follow Him with deep commitment. This is His church, He is the risen Lord we come to worship and the head of the church. He gives us purpose and mission that go beyond this building & this hour. Jesus gave his life for the church, so maybe it needs to be more than optional and more than a mere building and more than 10:30-10:45.

And my **giving box** is getting pushed too because Jesus called Levi to walk away from his wealthy tax collector business and follow Him. But I like my disposable income and my vacations and the list goes on. I'm comfortable with my giving box being around 2% like most American Christians.

But Christ is opening that box and asking me to consider the God who gave His Son and the Son who gave His life and shouldn't I give to His church? And the challenge is to live in Christ and not self-made boxes. And we all have them and they've been challenged by our merge... But the greatness of Christ, His example, His teaching, His compassion, the joy of His salvation challenges us to open them up, examine them and make more room for the greatness of Christ in our lives.