

透过现象看本质——马可福音 2:18-22

The Reality Behind the Surface Issue – Mark 2:18-22

Introduction & Outline

- Reading: Mark 2:18-22; Colossians 2:13-23
- Teaching text: Mark 2:18-22 (NASB1995)

18 John’s disciples and the Pharisees were fasting; and they *came and *said to Him, “Why do John’s disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?” **19** And Jesus said to them, “While the bridegroom is with them, []the attendants of the bridegroom cannot fast, can they? So long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. **20** But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day.

21 “No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; otherwise []the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear results. **22** No one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost and the skins *as well*; but *one puts* new wine into fresh wineskins.”

- Fever and headache are the surface issue, and the reality behind could be some virus or it could be the vaccine you got yesterday. Failure of an exam is the surface issue, and the reality behind could be low IQ or it could be laziness. A church can attract lots of people on the surface, and the reality behind could be God's blessing or it could be Satan's deception. By and large, the teachings of Jesus are to challenge us to look beyond the surface issue! It is all too easy for us to look merely on the surface without thinking about the reality behind, or to rush to judgment about the reality when all we see is the superficial.
- Outline:
 - Title: The Reality Behind the Surface Issue
 - 1. The Surface Issue: Fasting (v18)
 - 2. The Reality #1: Who Is Jesus (vv 19-20)
 - 3. The Reality #2: Incompatible Foundations (vv 21-22)

The Surface Issue: Fasting (v18)

- Background: Jesus and disciples just had a feast at Levi's house (vv. 15-17). As they cheerfully went out from there, full and satisfied, they ran right into this group of hungry people with their stomachs all empty from fasting.

- “Fasting”: At that time, the Jews generally believed that fasting was a necessary expression of reverence for God as required by the Mosaic Law. But in fact, the Law required only one fasting once a year, and it’s only for the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:29-34).

True meaning of fasting: It is to “humble your souls” in order to seek God wholeheartedly for a specific burden. It could be for confession of sin, or for prayer on some urgent spiritual need. It is to put aside voluntarily one’s physical needs temporarily in order to pray hard to God for the more important spiritual needs. It is willingly out of the heart, not required by law.

As the Jews went spiritually corrupt, their religion became more and more superficial. Fasting has gradually become a tradition, a merit, and even a thing to brag about. The purpose is no longer to seek God humbly, but to show off one’s own spiritual attainment. Pharisees fasted twice a week (Luke 18:12), once on Monday and once on Thursday.

- “John’s disciples”: What have they to do with the Pharisees? When the Pharisees asked John to baptize them, they got rebuked harshly (Matt. 3:7-10). John’s disciples couldn’t have been ignorant about the Pharisees’ spiritual corruptness. Most likely explanation: They were used by the Pharisees. Their fasting may have come from a genuine heart of repentance, as was exemplified in the Old Testament (e.g. Jonah 3:5-9), and they may have some genuine confusion about why Jesus’ disciples do not fast. The Pharisees took advantage of this and recruited them to question Jesus, making it appear as though they were on the same side.

Insight: Formalism has such a strong influence that even John’s disciples who had heard John preach all the time on true repentance, knowing they had nothing to do with the Pharisees, would compromise on this issue, that they’d feel that at least on fasting the Pharisees were doing a better job.

- “Why...Your disciples do not fast”: The Pharisees would say this with a tone of self-righteous pride and contempt for Jesus; while John’s disciples would likely have a different tone of sincere inquiry, genuinely wanting to hear how Jesus would respond. Despite the tone, they both had their focus on the surface issue. Jesus challenges them to see the reality behind the surface issue.

The Reality #1: Who Is Jesus (vv 19-20)

- “While the groom is with them”: A wedding parable. Weddings are festive occasions. Jewish weddings are joyous celebrations. They would hold a week-long banquet for the newlyweds and welcome guests to come in anytime to eat, drink, sing, and dance. The attendants, that is, the bridegroom's guests, must attend with joy, or it’d be highly inappropriate. Jewish rabbis even taught explicitly that "The groom's guests are not subject to any religious rules that would interfere with their joy." This includes fasting.

The point of the parable is the identity of the groom. Jesus is the groom. John the Baptist used the same parable (John 3:29) to describe his joy when he saw Jesus baptizing many disciples, so John's disciples should’ve understood right away. They should’ve concluded that Jesus is

the Messiah to whom John testified, so they must believe in him and follow him, and follow him joyfully. The joy of the Messiah's presence is totally incompatible with the proper attitude for fasting.

If the groom's guests are to rejoice over the groom, shouldn't Jesus' disciples rejoice all the more over Jesus? Here we must see the joy of the gospel! The presence of God is the best news, so Christians must rejoice!

Luke 4:18-19 “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He anointed Me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to captives, And recovery of sight to the blind, To set free those who are oppressed, To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.”

Insight: Joy is a basic sign of true faith, whereas the sign of legalism is sadness. Legalism only knows rules and regulations. No matter whether they think they can meet the standard or not, there is no joy of the Lord’s presence, only cold sadness of desperate striving. If you believe you are a true Christian but your joy is often lacking, check this: Do you often fall into the trap of legalism? Do you add many rules and regulations to the Bible in order to judge others and judge yourself?

- “But the days will come when the groom is taken away from them”: “Taken away” implies a sudden, violent, unexpected leave against one's will. Normal weddings obviously don't have this step. Jesus is clearly implying his death on the cross. At that time, the disciples would be fasting, for it would mean great sorrow and pain for them.

Issiah 53:8 “By oppression and judgment He was taken away; And as for His generation, who considered That He was cut off from the land of the living For the wrongdoing of my people, to whom the blow was due?”

Daniel 9:26 “Then after the sixty-two weeks, the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing ...”

Insight: Your relationship with Jesus dictates your expression of worship in every occasion. It is not the external religious rituals that determine how you worship, but your relationship with Jesus and the proper expression of that relationship in each situation. The Pharisees got it all reversed. They define their relationship with God by external performances, but the truth of God is to define external performances by the relationship with God. The Judaism system at that time was completely irreparable.

The Reality #2: Incompatible Foundations (vv 21-22)

- “unshrunk cloth...old garment...new wine...wineskins”: Two parables, one of mending clothes and one of the wine-making process. New cloth will shrink and tear old garments; new wine will ferment, produce gas, and burst old wineskins.

The two parables illustrate the same principle: the religious system at that time was completely corrupt beyond any hope. It had reached the point where it was totally incompatible with the truth. Jesus taught sinners to repent; they wouldn't admit they were sinners. Jesus taught the

grace of forgiveness; they just wanted to prove their own righteousness. Jesus taught regeneration that they needed a new heart; they didn't even know what the heart was, for all they saw was the flesh. Jesus taught joyful and willing obedience; they taught legalistic abstinence. Jesus taught how to please God; they just wanted to please men. Jesus taught an internal relationship, they taught external rules. One must completely abandon the old traditions taught by the Pharisees in order to accept the truth of God's salvation.

Key point: If you want to follow Jesus, you must discard the whole set of religious ideas which focus on external appearance!

Some things can't be fixed with patches! In the era of Martin Luther, Roman Catholicism could no longer be patched, so there was the Reformation. Today, you cannot patch manmade psychology theories with the work of the Holy Spirit; you cannot patch monkey-to-human evolution with the historical account of Genesis. These things are fundamentally incompatible with the Bible! As to salvation, you can never patch the lies of man trying to save himself by works with the biblical truth that God is the One who actively saves sinners.

- “but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins.”: The new wine is the truth of the gospel. The new wineskin is the new heart which sees his own sins and humbly confesses and desires to be forgiven. Only in this way can we know Jesus correctly, be accepted by God, and live a true life of worship.

Summary: Who are you? A hard-hearted Pharisee? A confused disciple of John? Or a joyful disciple of Jesus? Have you had the joy of your soul from truly knowing Jesus, following Him, and being in communion with Him every day?

Three application points for believers:

- 1、 Beware of legalism! For example: "Godly Christians don't watch movies. I don't watch movies, so I'm godly; you watch movies, and you're not as godly as I am." This is cold and sad legalism!
- 2、 Beware of liberalism! For example: "I'm under grace, it's no big deal to say curse words, and it's no big deal to miss worship gatherings frequently." True Christians know the preciousness of salvation, are willing to obey, and rely on the Holy Spirit to constantly put sin to death.
- 3、 Beware of formalism! When you serve, sing hymns, or read the Bible, check whether you really mean it. Or is it gradually becoming a formality? Lack of joy is a very dangerous sign! All services and spiritual disciplines are special opportunities to experience the Lord's presence, so there should be special joy doing them! If not, you must stop and examine your heart. Don't allow yourself to fall into formalism. Be sure to let joy drive your obedience. The best way to destroy your testimony is to do all the godly things and then put on a sad bitter face. Nobody wants to have that kind of faith!