

## Something Old, Something New

Matthew 9:14-17

### Introduction:

“Something old, something **new**” (there’s a wedding in the story but nothing borrowed or blue). Let’s think about something new that is important in my current world.

**New Math:** “I’m not getting any younger.” Lots of things remind me of how old I am, especially the more time I hang out with Generation Z at SJU (no more OMG or TBH). Whole **new vocabulary** ( don’t try to use them unless you want to be ridiculed). (1) If you’re in agreement with something you can say “bet” (e.g., “Let’s grab coffee at noon.” “Bet.”). (2) “Shade” is not protection from the sun but something “thrown” in the form of an underhanded critical remark. (3) If you want to compliment music you can call a great song a “bop” or even a “banger” (thanks “headbanging” Boomers). But I’ve been dealing with a 7 year old learning second grade math but more specifically (bom bom bom) **new math**. I’ve slowly been won over to the logic of the **new way**. In this passage, we see that Jesus’ arrival is a new thing that shakes up the traditions of the people and the patterns of the world.

<sup>14</sup> Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?” <sup>15</sup> And Jesus said to them, “Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast. <sup>16</sup> No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch tears away from the garment, and a worse tear is made. <sup>17</sup> Neither is new wine put into old wineskins. If it is, the skins burst and the wine is spilled and the skins are destroyed. But new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved.”<sup>1</sup>

**Context:** The King of kings arrives, fulfilling the longstanding promise of God to rule and reign over his people and be their God. Jesus is God become king! To establish his kingdom and prove his identity he begins by teaching with the authority of God, healing with the power of God, and calling people to follow him. The Pharisees (a particularly persnickety religious group) had problems with Jesus’ claim to be God and the way he demonstrated and taught righteousness. They don’t think Jesus is God become flesh because **he’s doing things differently than they think God would do them** (e.g., hanging out with the wrong people, healing on the wrong days, saying the wrong things, etc.).

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<sup>1</sup> <sup>14</sup> Τότε προσέρχονται αὐτῷ οἱ μαθηταὶ Ἰωάννου λέγοντες, Διὰ τί ἡμεῖς καὶ οἱ Φαρισαῖοι νηστεύομεν [πολλά], οἱ δὲ μαθηταὶ σου οὐ νηστεύουσιν; <sup>15</sup> καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς, Μὴ δύνανται οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ νυμφῶνος πενθεῖν ἐφ’ ὅσον μετ’ αὐτῶν ἐστὶν ὁ νυμφίος; ἐλεύσονται δὲ ἡμέραι ὅταν ἀπαρθῇ ἀπ’ αὐτῶν ὁ νυμφίος, καὶ τότε νηστεύσουσιν. <sup>16</sup> οὐδεὶς δὲ ἐπιβάλλει ἐπίβλημα ῥάκους ἀγνάφου ἐπὶ ἱματίῳ παλαιῷ· αἶρει γὰρ τὸ πλήρωμα αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ ἱματίου καὶ χειρὸν σχίσμα γίνεται. <sup>17</sup> οὐδὲ βάλλουσιν οἶνον νέον εἰς ἀσκοὺς παλαιούς· εἰ δὲ μή γε, ῥήγνυνται οἱ ἀσκοὶ καὶ ὁ οἶνος ἐκχεῖται καὶ οἱ ἀσκοὶ ἀπόλλυνται· ἀλλὰ βάλλουσιν οἶνον νέον εἰς ἀσκοὺς καινοὺς, καὶ ἀμφότεροι συντηροῦνται.

Jesus' arrival is shaking things up, the old is gone and the new has come, and certain people don't like it.

### 1. Criticizing Question (v. 14)

<sup>14</sup> Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?"

**A New Opponent:** Introduced to a new group (e.g., John's disciples) but they **self-identify** with the Pharisees (e.g., we and the Pharisees). I wouldn't want to lump myself in with the Pharisees. They seem to have the same Pharisaic objections to Jesus.

- Who are John's disciples? They are those that followed John the Baptist rather than Jesus. John had a ministry of calling people to repentance and baptizing them. If you remember, in **John 3** Jesus' disciples begin baptizing and John's disciples get upset.
  - People are leaving to follow Jesus and get baptized. "John, did your baptism not work? They're stealing our followers."
  - The disciples think 'cause John prepared the way for Jesus and introduced Jesus to the people that John should have priority. But John says "He must increase, but I must decrease" (Jn 3:30).<sup>2</sup>
  - John answered them, "I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie. The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.'" (Jn 1:26-30).
- John had attracted people but a group of his followers seems to have kept together after his imprisonment and failed to listen to John and follow Jesus. John was never jealous of Jesus but some of his disciples seem to be.

**Fasting:** Fasting plays a central role in the story. What do you think when you hear of fasting? Gandhi, prison fast, etc. (e.g., protest, threat of self-destruction, etc.). In that sense it's different from true Biblical fasting which is never about asserting my will but opening myself to God's will.

- Be careful when you think of fasting not to think it's a way to coerce God into answering your prayers. It doesn't make you holier or more righteous (e.g., Evangelical counsels to separate religious, like monks, to laity or "ordinary" Christians). Fasting isn't spiritual bonus points to be spent at God's miracle bank.
- Do we have this view about religion and spirituality (e.g., Sunday night, Wednesday night, Pharisees at the Sermon on the Mount).
- The disciplines we pursue we must always be invitations not obligations. They're opportunities to know God not meritorious acts (e.g., don't be the Luke 15 older brother, "I've served you all this time and never disobeyed a command therefore you owe me").

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<sup>2</sup> John is the best man to Jesus as the groom (Jn 3).

- Fasting was part of the Old Testament. We see people fast (e.g., Daniel, Moses, etc.) to prepare to hear from God, when they are mourning, or when there is some sort of spiritual emergency. However, the only prescribed fast for the people of God was the annual Day of Atonement (e.g., *Yom Kippur*, the great day of national repentance). This fasting was an act of humility and repentance.
- There were lots of times you *could* fast but to be an observant and obedient Jew you only *needed* to fast once a year at *Yom Kippur*.

**Pharisee Fasting:** Fasting began to take on more importance among various groups like the Pharisees during the time of Jesus.<sup>3</sup> The Pharisees not only **went** beyond the OT regulations but looked down on everyone else who didn't live up to their personal standard. They saw fasting as a particularly clear sign of their virtue and righteousness. Fasting became a favorite tool in the Pharisaic self-righteousness tool-belt.

- More fasts = more righteousness (e.g., twice a week, Monday/Thursday). Who can deny that I am more holy if I fast more (and they liked to show it off, hence Jesus' teaching in Matt. 6). *If I'm more holy then I have more power and respect in the community.*
- The Pharisees have turned fasting into something it was never meant to be. Fasting was meant to be a physical reminder of our need for God. Our desire for food is meant to drive us to desire God. In it's best iteration, voluntary fasting is going without food as a reminder that we are without God. **Fasting is going without what is needed because I actually need what I'm most without.**
- Fasting is not a means to demonstrate my personal righteousness or to get God to reward my sacrifice. The prophets repeatedly remind that fasting is no guarantee that God will hear our prayers (e.g., you fast but continue in sin and I do not hear you, Jer 14, Is 58).

**What's Really Going On?:** Fasting is the occasion. What they're really asking is about the difference between them and Jesus' disciples. Jesus' disciples are eating and drinking, having fun, not following the Pharisees' rules! They're not suffering (e.g., *if we suffer we want others to suffer*, e.g., Theological German). It doesn't seem that they are living as rigorous or holy a life. They're insinuating that Jesus must not be serious about holiness.

- Righteousness shouldn't be easy or fun! But it is!
- This proves that bad assumptions and bad questions lead to bad answers (e.g., why do bad things happen to good people; there are no good people).
- They are assuming that righteousness is a function of behavior and following certain rules. They assume Jesus is like John or the other Rabbis (e.g., just different godly leaders). They are elevating John and the Pharisees and demeaning Jesus. He is in a class all by himself (e.g., *Jehovah's Witnesses conversation*).

**Self-Righteousness:** The Pharisees are the definition of "self-righteous" (i.e., by yourself you can be righteous). They judge everyone else by their personal standard and, in the end, miss

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<sup>3</sup> Fasting in 2TJ (Pharisees, etc.) increases in importance (e.g., Gentiles saw it as a mark of the Jews).

that “no one is righteous” except God and he has come to bring them righteousness through his death on the cross. **Their own piety blinds them to the possibility of salvation.**

**2. Critical Misunderstanding (v. 15-17)** Jesus teaches these disciples using three illustrations:

**a. Misunderstood the Identity of Jesus (v. 15)** <sup>15</sup> And Jesus said to them, “Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.

**Angry:** There are certain times and places when you shouldn’t be angry (e.g., skipping while mad, some activities require at least a little bit of joy). Go to a sporting “worship service” at least half the people will end up mad. But you shouldn’t be angry at a wedding (e.g., Whitney’s involuntary wedding dance face; Ben’s wedding dance moves).

**Jesus the Groom:** Jesus uses a wedding illustration to explain the joy and celebration of his disciples. If fasting is primarily a sad or mourning activity, then it has no place at the wedding (e.g., don’t diet at a wedding, “big” people wedding).

- The reason the disciples don’t fast is because their groom has come.
- The point of the fast is to *long* for God to come and satisfy. In Jesus, God has come. The fast was a sign of God’s coming (e.g., *Yom Kippur* vs. Heb 10, <sup>1</sup> For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. <sup>2</sup> Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? <sup>3</sup> But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. <sup>4</sup> For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins... <sup>11</sup> And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. <sup>12</sup> But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, <sup>13</sup> waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. <sup>14</sup> For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified).
- The Pharisees continue to fast because they miss the sign. **They love the sign more than the one the sign points to.** Continuing to fast in the presence of Jesus is like going to chemotherapy for fun after the cancer is gone.
- It’s really an insult, it’s like showing up to a wedding and being a Debbie Downer, sad and gloomy. It takes all of the focus off of the couple getting married.

**Future Fasting:** There will be a time to fast (when Jesus goes away to prepare us a place) but there also won’t be any fasting in heaven when we are with our Savior (e.g., no more tears, etc).

- There is a place for fasting in our lives as believers, its a place of anticipation for the day when all of our desires will be satisfied in Jesus.
- “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied” (Matt 5:6).

- The beauty when we fast now is the promise that our hunger for God will be satisfied.

**Are We Like the Pharisees?:** “We can drift from God with our Bibles open in front of us.

Although we assume activities intended for growth in godliness — prayer, fellowship, Bible reading — are immune, we can still fail to bring God glory through them. The Pharisees had this problem. Jesus told them: “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life” (John 5:39–40). The Pharisees searched the Scriptures, devoted their lives to obeying the Law of Moses but they missed the bright neon sign flashing “Messiah.” **The Pharisees knew God’s word, but they didn’t recognize Jesus.** Imagine taking an interest in some famous movie star. You study their biography, see all their movies, and watch every interview but they walk into your house and you don’t recognize them. We marvel at the blindness of the Pharisees, yet some of us have the same problem.

- We have the same problem when we are amazed at our “great high priest” yet fail to boldly “draw near to the throne of grace” to receive mercy (Heb 4:16).
- We have the same problem when we memorize Psalm 121:1-2: “I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord,” but we fail to turn to God in times of need.
- We have the same problem when we stack up flash cards of memorized verses, hoard books of theological knowledge, and fill our schedule with Christian activity but don’t abide in Jesus and glorify him in our hearts, when we seek the knowledge *about* God but never actually *meet with* God – when the knowledge we seek never gets into our hearts.

**b. Misunderstood the Means of Righteousness (v. 16)** <sup>16</sup> No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch tears away from the garment, and a worse tear is made.

**Patterns of Righteousness:** We fall into patterns (e.g., 40 hours work a week, 4.5 hours television a day). Maybe we sneak a few hours of church (only 18% of self-professed Christians read their Bible every day).

- We’ve fit in our religious habits like a well-worn pair of pants. We know what we think works (e.g., Sunday, Wednesday, hymnal memorization, etc).
- You get the results you’re setup to get. You get exactly what you’re designed to get.
- The Pharisees were designed for self-righteousness and hypocrisy.
- Jesus doesn’t fit into that manmade scheme.

**Pharisaic Self-Righteousness:** (Explain the idea of putting an unshrunk cloth patch on a worn in piece of clothing). The new way of Jesus is incompatible with the religious traditions represented by disciples of John and the Pharisees.

- Jesus can’t just be patched into the Pharisaical way of doing things. They were trying to patch the holes in their righteousness with religious activity but it only made the hole worse. The more they try to fit Jesus into their paradigm the more the “hole” in their righteousness rips and is exposed.

- They don't need a patch on their clothes, they need new clothes (when we have holes in our clothes we try to turn it into a fashion statement, kind of like our righteousness).
  - Have you been trying to patch your sin with a few good works (e.g., maybe Bible Study, prayer, etc. will fix this)?
- The righteousness of God is the gift of a new outfit of righteousness purchased by Jesus not a few patches on the hand-me-downs of your old, sinful life.

**c. Misunderstood the Plan of Salvation (v. 17)** <sup>17</sup> Neither is new wine put into old wineskins. If it is, the skins burst and the wine is spilled and the skins are destroyed. But new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved.”

**Old Covenant:** They not only were trying to fit Jesus into their manmade religious traditions they missed the point of the commands, traditions, and promises that were actually in the Old Testament.

- Fasting was in the Old Testament (not the way they did it).
- They misunderstood the relationship between the Hebrew Bible and Jesus.
- Jesus compares himself to “new wine” that they are trying to put in an old wineskin (e.g., the brittle old wine skin will burst with the new fermenting wine).
- Why are there new forms in the church? We are not simply Old Covenant Jews we have new wineskins and that's the way it was meant to be.
- All of God's laws were perfect and right and true but we also have to understand their purpose. Some of the things God commanded the Israelites to do, you may notice, we don't still do (e.g., shrimp, bacon, etc.). Is that because God changed his diet plan? No, the law always had a certain “built-in obsolescence.” The people of God had various ceremonies and customs to preserve their holiness in the midst of their enemies and **point to a future savior that would redeem them once-for-all-time.**

**New Covenant:** In their misunderstanding of the purpose and plan of God, these Pharisees are trying to stuff Jesus into something he was never meant for and, in the process, bursting the “wine skin” and “spilling the wine.” Jesus didn't come to abolish the law (i.e., “burst it”) but to fulfill it. Jesus preserves the promises of the Old Covenant by fulfilling them.

- The temporary righteousness of the Old is made permanent by the New.
- If we are to ever have perfect, permanent, forever righteousness, holiness, and forgiveness then we need something **new** to happen. How do I know this? Not just from Jesus but **from the very words of the Old Testament.**
- <sup>31</sup> “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, <sup>32</sup> not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. <sup>33</sup> For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. <sup>34</sup> And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from



the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jer 31:31-34).

- Ever had an old car (e.g., silver Toyota Corolla station wagon or 2-door 1992 Nissan Sentra). I can fix it up, paint it, swap out parts, but it'll never be new. The Pharisees have been swapping parts, trying new routines, but they can't make their hearts new. Only God can make them new.

**Where is Christ in the Old Covenant?:** The Old Testament is always hinting at something to come, always pointing toward a future fulfillment. The Old Testament is highlighting the fact that a perfect prophet, a perfect king, a perfect sacrifice, a perfect priest, and a perfect Savior is coming. That's why Jesus and the apostles understand the Old Testament to testify to him. Where is Christ in the Old Testament? Christ is the subject of the Old Testament, he is the object of faith in the Old Testament (and salvation has **always been by faith**). Jesus always came to fulfill the Old covenant not fit into its temporary forms. It always pointed to him as the better way.

- Yet the Pharisees and others missed the very self-proclaimed purpose of the Hebrew Bible. They were living in the old when the new had come.

**Nu Thang:** Jesus came to make all things new. So with him, come new categories and paradigms (i.e., God-man), new ways of living (righteous shall live by faith not works), and a new kingdom (e.g., the last will be first, etc.). Jesus' new way doesn't fit with the old ways of the world.

- Maybe you've been pursuing Jesus in all the classic ways: be better, do better, try harder, etc. The ways you've been doing it don't work. He didn't come to make bad people good but dead people alive!

### **Conclusion:**

**Our Groom:** Remember the first illustration Jesus used. I want to end our time looking at that groom. He has come to save you. He has come to pay the bride price. He has demonstrated what marital love is by laying down his life for his bride. He has paid for us with a price, the price of his own blood (e.g., Acts 20:28, 1 Cor 6:20).

- He has purchased righteousness for us, like clothes that will fit us better later (e.g., shoe shopping). He's working in us now to make us into what we are in him. So that is why we fast now, because our groom has gone away and we are waiting for his return. One day, in heaven, we will feast with perfect joy at the marriage supper of the lamb. We will celebrate in the presence of our savior.
- The biggest trial we have to endure in the meantime is being away from him.
- I wonder, today, if you know the joy and promise of your savior.