

17 – Fasting, Patches, and Wineskins

Series on Mark

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Bible Text: Mark 2:18-22
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Let's turn now to the Gospel of Mark 2 and read verses 18 through 22 which are also our text for this morning. Mark 2:18-22. Hear the word of God as it comes to you this morning.

18 And the disciples of John and of the Pharisees used to fast: and they come and say unto [Jesus], Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but thy disciples fast not? 19 And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? as long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. 20 But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days. 21 No man also seweth a piece of new cloth on an old garment: else the new piece that filled it up taketh away from the old, and the rent is made worse. 22 And no man putteth new wine into old bottles: else the new wine doth burst the bottles, and the wine is spilled, and the bottles will be marred: but new wine must be put into new bottles.

Thus far the reading of God's sacred word.

Dear congregation, in our studies on the book of Mark, we've noticed that Mark more than any other Gospel writer packs a lot of material into very short compass and he does that again in our text this morning. We read of fasting, sons of the bridechamber, new patches of cloth, and new wine in new wineskins, all packed into five verses. You may have wondered as we read these verses what do all these customs and practices have to do with 21st century Gospel living? That's my task this morning, to show you that these five verses have everything to do with contemporary, Gospel, Christian living. So we look, then, this morning at Mark 2:18-22 and we consider the following theme and points: fasting, patches and wineskins. That's our title, "Fasting, Patches and Wineskins." We'll look, first, at a challenging question answered; second, a deeper issue addressed; and third, a personal question asked. A challenging question, deeper issue, personal question.

Now the challenging question arises already in verse 18, "the disciples of John and of the Pharisees used to fast: and they come and say unto him," that is, Jesus, "Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but thy disciples fast not?" We need to answer two things here: who is doing the asking and why? When we look at the word "they" here, "they asked," Matthew 9:14 in the parallel account tells us specifically that these are John the Baptist's disciples. Not all of John the Baptist's disciples but particularly those who are still John the Baptist's disciples even though Jesus has begun his ministry and John himself has said, "Behold the Lamb of God. Follow him." Now these disciples regularly fasted and perhaps were impacted here by the Pharisees who had a similar question, even though from a different approach, for Jesus. The Pharisees, you know, fasted twice a week, every Monday and every Thursday, but Matthew tells us it's particularly these John the Baptist disciples who had not yet left John and followed Jesus who asked this question in sympathy with the same question the Pharisees ask as well. So these disciples have embraced the revelation that God gave through John but, I remind you, John, at present, Mark 1:14, is in prison and John himself had said to these disciples, "You are to leave me. This is the reason I came, to point to Jesus. You are to leave me and go to the Lord Jesus Christ. He must increase, I must decrease." So in John 3 about this time when some of these people who had a wrong attachment with John the Baptist came to him and said, "Aren't you upset, John? Everyone is running after Jesus." John basically answers and says, "Of course I'm not upset. Is the best man at the wedding upset when everyone looks at the bridegroom? Behold the Lamb of God. He is the bridegroom."

So we must regard these disciples of John who ask this question about fasting, as those who instead of viewing John as a bridge who would move people from the typology of the Old Testament and the old covenant, that is, the administration of the covenant of grace in an Old Testament way, into the wonderful privileges of a more expanded new covenant blessing brought by Christ, instead, they got stuck on the bridge, as it were. John, as you know, had one foot in the Old Testament economy and one foot in the new and he's the transition figure, the forerunner of the Lord Jesus, but he's pointing his disciples to Jesus, to the kingdom of Christ and to the new covenant blessings in Jesus, but some of his followers get stuck, as it were, halfway and these are the ones asking this question. So they've taken to heart John's message to a certain degree but in the meanwhile they've taken his structure of his message, his call to repentance as so on, and they've built around it a kind of regular fasting life similar at least in that one respect, to the Pharisees.

Now later on in the book of Acts, there are still indications that some of John's disciples still had not come to the Lord Jesus Christ, still did not fully embrace the message of John the Baptist, because if they had, they would have gone to Jesus instead of remaining John's disciples. So John's disciples, then, this segment of them at least, they come to Jesus and they ask this challenging question, "We're engaged in regular fasting, the Pharisees are engaged in regular fasting, why aren't your disciples fasting?" And by fasting, of course, they mean in biblical terms either a total or partial abstinence from food for a fixed period of time, usually one day, in connection with deep spiritual exercises associated with a need to repent, or exercises of grief and sorrow over sin or

problems, and the Pharisees, you see, and these particular disciples of John had made that a regular implementation, something that the New Testament nor the Old actually commands. Actually the Old Testament only commanded one annual fast a year on the great Day of Atonement, Luke 16:29-34. So these disciples of John were troubled by this and, you see, they're prone to add not nearly as badly as the Pharisees, but still prone to add to the commands of John the Baptist because John the Baptist never said that, as well as to the Lord Jesus.

So they're disturbed and they come with this question, "Why are your disciples always feasting," we saw it last time, they were feasting, the question comes right on the heels of that in the house of Levi with publicans and sinners, "Why are you feasting and not fasting?" Well, that's a challenging question and what is Jesus going to say? Jesus is, of course, the wisest theologian of all time and he answers in a very practical yet theological nuanced way, he answers in the form of a question, verse 19, and in the form of a prediction in verse 20. It's like a twofold answer. A question, he gives a counter-question to it, and then he gives a prediction. In verse 19 he says, "Can the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? as long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast." I mean, this is profound. This is powerful. This is gripping imagery. Jesus is using relevant imagery here by answering their question. He's referring to an ordinary wedding practice that everyone would understand. He's saying these children of the bridechamber are close friends of the bridegroom. Here they are at the wedding, so he's picturing a wedding for them, right, and in our modern terminology, Jesus is saying, "They're sitting at the head table with the bride and the groom and can you imagine what it would be like if they were fasting when the bridegroom is with them." There sits the bridegroom and there is his bride and left and right are his best man, his ushers, his closest friends, the bride's attendants. Everyone is feasting but you notice that three of the friends say, sitting close by, "Don't eat at all." Everyone else is eating. They may take a sip of water now and then but those three don't eat one bite of food and their faces are sad and, boys and girls, they look like they're in pain on their faces and you'd look at them and you'd say, especially after a few hours go by at the wedding reception, "What's wrong with them? Something is seriously wrong. A wedding reception when the bridegroom is present and the bride, it's a time of rejoicing and feasting, not a time for fasting and mourning and pain and sorrow."

So, you see, Jesus counters the question with a question. He says, "John the Baptist disciples, don't you know I'm the Lamb of God? I'm the bridegroom. Are my disciples supposed to fast when I'm with them this short period of three year ministry when I'm going to be with them? Are they really supposed to fast now? That would be like the closest friends of the bridegroom fasting at his wedding reception. It would be unthinkable, completely out of harmony with the whole setting. Fasting is a symbol of mourning and heaviness of heart, but now that I am with my disciples, it's a time of rejoicing and feasting from the bridegroom among them."

Well, these words are all the more gripping because the last words uttered by John the Baptist are also the same imagery, you see. When his disciples try to get him upset, others are following Jesus, he said, "It's my greatest delight when he gets all the attention."

I'm the friend of the bridegroom pointing to the bridegroom and saying, 'Behold the Lamb of God.'" So Jesus picks up on the very imagery John the Baptist used and said in subtle ways, "Why aren't you believing?" John the Baptist himself, "The bridegroom is here. You're looking at him. Why should there be fasting?"

Then in verse 20, Jesus proceeds to make a prediction, "But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days." A time of sadness will come. Jesus uses the word "taken away," which is actually found only at this place, the Greek word and the parallel passages in the Gospels, in all the New Testament and most scholars would say it's a direct allusion to a similar word used in Isaiah 53:8, "He was taken from prison and from judgment," predicted of Christ, "and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken."

So Jesus is saying, "My disciples are to rejoice today. I am with them. Ecclesiastes says there's a time for all things under the sun: a time for joy and a time for sorrow. This is a time for joy, the time for sorrow will come when I'm taken away from them by violent hands. But even that heaviness, according to John 16, won't be long because I promise I will come back in the great day, and meanwhile I will very soon send my Holy Spirit to be your Comforter that your sorrow may be turned to joy." That's what Jesus answered to this question and it's basically this, "My disciples don't fast because the present circumstances don't warrant fasting, though future circumstances will, but then only for a short time because I will send my Comforter. I'm coming to extend to you the fullness of my covenant of grace blessings. Jew and one day Gentile and the Gospel will go to the ends of the earth." Jesus doesn't say all that here yet but, you see, that's the spirit. He's bringing a new situation, a new breakthrough. He's going to dismantle, you see, the Old Testament civil and ceremonial laws and they will disappear, as it were, except their principles, and the Gospel door is going to go open and God's going to dwell in the hearts of his people and things are going to be bigger and better in terms of Gospel distribution, no longer confined mainly to the Jews but to go out over all the ends of the earth. So this New Testament era, yes, there will be grief over sin, fundamentally a Christian is called to rejoice in the Gospel.

That's what Jesus is saying and so Jesus is actually taking the question and he's unpacking a deeper issue behind the question and that's what we notice in our second thought in verses 21 and 22 where Jesus offers two parables. When you first read these parables, you think, "What? What does that have to do with fasting and with this question?" I want to show you that there is a direct connection. A direct connection.

Now these parables which are known as the parable of the patch, or the patches, and the parable of the wineskins really are conveying something very similar. One problem we have in understanding these parables today is that in our modern day we live in an age of preshrunk wash-and-wear fabrics and so we don't understand this quite as grippingly as the people of Jesus' day would, but remember Jesus is speaking here before there are preshrunk materials, before there are any synthetic fibers available. Before you could ever wear or use any garment in Jesus' day, you had to preshrink it whatever cloth or

wool or other natural material you had, and if you did not do that, the garment which would fit you before you washed it, would, of course, become too small for you to wear after you washed it.

So Jesus paints a picture here. He says consider after a number of usages that you get a tear in a garment. I have a handkerchief here with me so I want you to picture this, I want you to understand it. Let's say in the center of this handkerchief there is a tear, so what you do is you say to yourself, "I'm going to fix that." Now how do you fix that in Jesus' day? You go out and you get a piece of cloth that's bigger than the tear area, a couple of inches bigger on all sides, and you lay that patch over the tear all the way around a couple extra inches, and then you sew it on, but if you forget to shrink the patch you sew on, when you then wash the new handkerchief with the patch, that patch will shrink and that will cause all those areas of that handkerchief to tear and so it would be worse, it would be worse than when you started out and you'll have tears everywhere. Now Jesus says in verse 21 no one would be so foolish to do that. Anyone who would repair a tear would preshrink the material first so it could lay on the preshrunk other material and there would be no tears when it would be washed in the future. That's what he's saying. Verse 21, he says it very succinctly, "No man also seweth a piece of new cloth on an old garment: else the new piece that filled it up taketh away from the old, and the rent is made worse." That's what Jesus is saying. So that's the parable of the patch.

Then Jesus goes on to give a second parable, parable of the wineskins. Now here again, we don't use skins to store water or wine in today. We've got plastic bottles, glass bottles, other containers, but in those days even some poor areas today in the Middle East, you'd see this picture powerfully before your eyes. What they'd do is they'd skin a goat or some other animal, be careful to cut it only where the four legs were, at the neck and the tail, and the skin would be peeled off that animal, the skin side would be kept on the outside. After treating the skin by tying off where the four legs were and the tail, they would use the neck or the tail part, turn it upside down and they would put liquid into the opening and they'd store their liquid, their water, their wine, in the skin. Now Jesus said no one who knows anything about storing wine in animal skins would ever put new wine into old wineskins. So think a moment of a skin that's been used for now several years, it's losing its elasticity, it's beginning to be brittle and Jesus says when you have a skin like that, maybe you can use it to hold water, I supposed, but you can't put new wine in it because the new wine will begin to ferment and with the fermentation it will begin to expand with the result that the old wineskin which has lost its elasticity, will burst open and you'll lose both the wine and the wineskin. No one with knowledge about these things would be so foolish, Jesus says, as to do that. Rather you put new wine into new wineskins that can still expand, and when the new wine ferments and expands, the new wineskins enlarge themselves, have more elasticity and both the wine and the skin are preserved.

So what's the point of these parables? Well, Jesus is saying this, "There is a deeper issue involved here, disciples of John, and you listening Pharisees. You must understand that with my disciples I am not concerned simply to put new patches on old garments. I've not come and become Incarnate and been ordained to ministry to just put new patches on the

old decadent Judaism. I've not come to just put patches on John's message. In other words, for those of who have gotten stalled on the bridge, you've only come part way into my kingdom and haven't yet come to me and experienced the fullness of the new covenant blessings and salvation in my person and in my work, for those of you who are still living out of the old wineskin of all the ceremonial laws and civil laws of Israel, I want you to know I've not come to put my teaching in the old wineskin of the Mosaic economy civil and ceremonial laws. That's not my mission." Jesus is announcing here, you see, as the opposition to his ministry begins to build up, he's announcing that there will be more radical changes, that he has mediated the new covenant, is determined to bring to his people. He's not just going to patch up the old, he's going to bring a new garment, a new kingdom, the final age. He's not going to put new wine into old skins but the new wine will be put into the new wineskins otherwise the new will only disrupt the old and burst its mold.

So that raises the real question behind the text, the deeper question and that's this: how are we to understand this relationship between the Old Testament, properly called the old covenant, and the New Testament, properly called the new covenant? Or how are we to understand the relationship between the old covenant administration of the covenant of grace in the Old Testament, and the new covenant administration of the covenant of grace in the New Testament? How are these two testaments related to each other?

Now there are several principles, of course, that we need to state in order to understand what Jesus is not saying as well as what he is saying and the first is this: the Bible teaches us clearly that there is a fundamental unity in God's purposes and God's people in the old and the new covenants, in the Old and the New Testament. It's clearly taught in Romans 11, Ephesians 2. There is one olive tree of redemptive purpose. There is one tree of God's elect redeemed people, not two trees. There is a fundamental unity of God's purposes and people in both economies.

Secondly, the Bible teaches the fundamental similarity of individual spiritual experience both in the Old and New Testament times. That's why the New Testament can demonstrate what faith is in Hebrews 11 by taking all those heroes of faith of the Old Testament, and when Paul is proving justification by faith, by faith alone in Romans 4, he doesn't use New Testament examples, he uses Abraham who lived before the giving of the law, and David who lived after the giving of the law. So we must never move from these clear teachings of the word, that there is a fundamental unity of God's purposes and people but also fundamental similarity of individual Christian experience.

That's why the Old Testament is so readable, so valuable today. When you read the Psalms which Calvin called the anatomy of all parts of the soul, you find your experience there, don't you? Your burdens are the same as the Psalmist's burdens. Your joys are the same as the Psalmist's joys. There is a similarity of religious experience. Yes, the Old Testament is more the promise and the New Testament the fulfillment, Old Testament more confined to the Jews and New Testament more to the entire world, but already in the Old Testament there is indications of a worldwide salvation. "God speaks through two lips," said Thomas Watson, "one is the Old, the other is the New Testaments." You

can't speak with only one lip. You couldn't have full revelation with only the New Testament. You wouldn't understand much of the New Testament without the Old. We need both.

Thirdly, the Bible teaches a fun continuity, then, and similarity of ethical norms in the old and the new covenants and Jesus is dealing with ethical problems, he's always taking people back to the Old Testament, even back to creation. In the New Testament epistles we are repeatedly taken back to the 10 Commandments for a specific and ethical requirement. So even though the civil law, ceremonial laws have been abolished in their details in the New Testament, a word about that in a moment, there is a fundamental continuity and similarity in the ethical norms.

So these three things are important to maintain, but here's the fourth thing: the Bible also teaches that as to the forms and the ceremonies that characterized the old covenant community, in contrast to the new and in terms of the identity and the constitution of that community, there is a change, even a radical change. You see it, for example, in John 4, the Samaritan woman when she talks to Jesus. She says, "Jesus, what is the right place to worship? Our fathers say here in this mountain, we Samaritans say this is the place. The Jews say Jerusalem. Which one is right?" And Jesus says, "Neither. Neither." He says, "The hour is coming and now is when true worshipers shall not worship in this mountain or in Jerusalem but will worship the Father in spirit and in truth." You see, there are some changes coming with the ushering in of the New Testament economy of the covenant of grace. Hebrews 8:13 tells us that the old economy, as to its external ceremonies and its forms, is vanishing away.

So here Jesus is implying without saying it very directly yet because it would be too much for people to take at that time and he could well have been crucified before his allotted time, he's implying, though, that the New Testament speaks of the abolition of these Old Testament civil, ceremonial laws and so on, and one of the problems you see here is that the Judaizers were trying to maintain everything from the Old Testament economy. They didn't realize the purpose of Jesus and his ministry yet. And even later on when Jesus sent his Holy Spirit, you remember in the book of Acts there is this great debate about how much of the Old Testament civil laws, especially ceremonial laws, was to be kept and the Judaizers are trying to press upon the Gentile converts circumcision, for example, and the keeping of various rituals of the law of Moses. What were they trying to do? They were trying to take the new covenant and put it into the old forms and ceremonies of the old covenant; they were trying to put new wine into old wineskins; they were trying to take the life-giving power of salvation by grace, the wine of free grace, and put it into the old wineskin of Judaism. They didn't understand this great principle.

Now you understand, you understand why this text has everything to do with the heart of the Gospel today because when Jesus gives out these cryptic parables of the patch and of the wineskins, he's saying to us today, "Look, if you only go halfway across the bridge and you don't enter the New Testament economy, you will forever have a string of questions about the disparity between what I teach my disciples to be and to do and what

the Pharisees are doing with all their man-made laws in addition to Old Testament law, and you'll get frozen on the bridge between the old and the new. You'll have one question after another. So you may be asking me a question about fasting but you're going to have a lot more such questions because you don't understand. I've come to make a new wineskin and give new wine for the new wineskin; to bring into Gospel freedom and new covenant community life, and if you don't grasp that, you're going to be offended with me again and again at every point in my ministry."

You see, it's not that Jesus is condemning Old Testament law. Far from that, he came to fulfill it. But he was condemning the traditions that had been developed especially by the Pharisees in addition to Old Testament law. So the old covenant community life together with man-made additions by the Pharisees with all these rules and regulations, a Jew today will tell you there are 613 rules to follow in their Torah and other law books, all of this Jesus is saying, "No, no. I'm bringing in a New Testament age."

These things are man-made. They're a burden. Peter in Acts 15:10 said, "We can't put this burden, an unbearable yoke upon the Gentiles because we, ourselves, couldn't bear all these rules and laws of the Pharisees." You see, this yoke went far beyond even the civil and ceremonial laws that God gave to Israel because Judaism, especially the Pharisees among the Judaizers, had added hundreds of these laws and the burden was so heavy. That's why the Pharisees, they weren't a happy people, they weren't a joyful people in the Lord. They were a duty people. They actually, someone wrote it this way, they actually whitened their faces, put ashes on their heads, wore their clothes in shoddy disarray, refused to wash and look as forlorn as possible. You could not be spiritual in their mind unless you were uncomfortable. They thought spirituality makes you do things you do not want to do, and keeps you from doing the things you want to do. But you see, the New Testament economy when the believer is born again and the temple is inside of him, where he is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, there is a profound joy and liberty in Christ, albeit a joy that still mourns over sin, of course, "Blessed are they who mourn," Jesus said, but it's a liberty which though preceded by the discovery of our bondage, it's still a liberty that brings us into the kingdom of God. That's why Paul could say the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking or fasting, but it is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.

That's why in Matthew 22, Jesus himself comes back to this. He uses, you remember that extended parable to show that the Gospel invitation is to come to a sumptuous wedding feast, not to a fasting. The Gospel is pictured like a wedding feast and everyone is invited to come. The Gospel is not a miserable message of the Pharisees that says, "Join our ranks. Learn our hundreds, our 613 rules and regulations, and then if you do all of that including fasting twice the week, well, maybe you'll be saved." "No, no," says Jesus. "That's an insufferable burden. Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy-laden and I will give you rest, particularly you who are laboring and heavy-laden under the terrible burden of decadent Judaism and of the influence of the Pharisees. Come to me." In other words, he's saying to those disciples of John, "You do well to believe what John said, repent of your sins, but you're not believing what John said, Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world."

Now today we can still be halfway across the bridge, we can believe very much in conviction of sin, that's well and good, and the need for repentance and to experience our misery. Well and good, it's important, it's the way to Christ, but if we don't traverse the way to Christ, if we don't believe in Christ alone for salvation by grace alone, if we don't know experiential deliverance as well as experiential misery, we haven't crossed the bridge into Gospel liberty and we'll be miserable and in bondage all our days until that happens. So today when we preach the Gospel, we don't give you 613 rules to follow and then say you're a Christian. We don't present you a joyless life, a sad and unhappy face as the essence of Christianity. No, obedience to Christ though it does involve following the rules of his word and the government of his house and so on, but essentially it is this, Jesus has come and the Gospel he offers in this New Testament age is his own saving life and power and we are to receive it. We're not to try to patch up decadent Pharisaical Judaism. We'll make the rent worse. We're not to put the new wine into old wineskins. Both will be lost. We're to come into the blessed liberty of the sons and daughters of God in the full Gospel revealed to us in the New Testament.

At the same time, we must not abuse this freedom. We must not say, "Well, therefore we don't have to live by the law as Christians." The 10 Commandments are still a guide of life. The Old Testament is still fully relevant to us today. We take the principles of the civil laws, the principles of the ceremonial laws. They're still true today. We don't want to go in the direction of the Pentecostals and the Charismatics today who many of them, at least, take this passage out of its context, out of the history of redemption and they say, "Do you see what Jesus is saying? You must reject anything that's not a fresh outpouring of the Spirit. Everything else," they say, "is old wine in old wineskins. Throw off all old forms, all traditions, all sense of connection with history. Create everything new." The problem is, you see, when it's not grounded in the word of God, it's not new. Nothing is new under the sun, it's just old man-made additions to the revelation of God and it involves foolish things that go beyond the Scriptures.

So we have to remember what does Jesus actually say about the New Testament Scriptures? In the New Testament Scriptures, what the new wineskin is. Well, the new wineskin is the New Testament church, its community, its life, its privileges, its duties, all that are prescribed by him. It does have laws. It does have guidelines. Not 613 detailed things. And it's bathed in grace, it's marinated in grace. We do these things out of gratitude now, not to merit salvation; out of gratitude for salvation. So we have new covenant ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper that are bloodless rather than the bloody ones of circumcision and Passover because Jesus has come, the new kingdom has been inaugurated, he's given his life once for all, there is no more blood to be shed. So we have new covenant ordinances, we have simplicity and purity of new covenant worship which we're engaging in right now as I speak, and new covenant responsibilities to live wholly and solely to God out of gratitude for salvation completed on Calvary's cross. Those are the new wineskins and to that we pour the wine of the Gospel.

So we don't break ourselves lose from all historical continuity between the two testaments. We don't cut the two testaments in two and say we don't have to preach from

the Old, it's only the New. No, the two of one whole, the two lips of God. But we do live in the New Testament age, the age where there is freedom to bring the Gospel to Gentiles like you and I are and we don't have to be circumcised, don't have to partake of the Passover, don't have to bring our turtledoves and our pigeons to church on Sunday morning to approach the temple and stand outside because we can't come in. It's all done away. The principles are there but it's done away. We approach God now with the sacrifice of his Son. You see, the principle is there and the Son dwells in our hearts. It's not even about this building, you see, it's about the temple inside. This is the real temple, worshipping the Father in spirit and in truth.

So, yes, we may have fasting from time to time when we feel the need for it, when we feel the need for personal repentance, when we feel the need for it because of sin in our own lives, or sin in the lives of others, or sin in the life of the church, or sin in the life of the nation, but we don't have fasting every Monday and every Thursday to make ourselves miserable. We don't seek to outdo God with our man-made traditions. We're called to exercise times of fasting but remembering even as we do there is liberty in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So the great message of this passage is something much deeper. Jesus takes them deeper than the question they ask. He says the dominant characteristic of the new covenant community is not one of mourning and heaviness but one of the presence of the bridegroom, and even though the bridegroom will leave for a little while, "I will soon send you the Comforter." You see, the dominance of the New Testament age is that through faith in Jesus, Spirit-worked faith by means of the word, blessed by the Spirit, you will live in a relationship, a foundational joy with God which brings delight to the heart of the bridegroom, but in and through the bridegroom he will bring delight by his Spirit, through his word, to your heart as well. There is a joy in him and he has a joy in you. As the Old Testament prophesied, he will delight over you with singing.

So all of this is to ask you, and that's my third thought, the personal question, are you living in the New Testament age of Gospel liberty in a crucified resurrected Redeemer? So the application here is a personal question: are you basing your hope for eternity in the Gospel freedom that Jesus presents? Is your religion dependent on what God gives to you and is free forgiveness and what God does for you graciously in Christ as a poor sinner who is completely demerited all his favor, have you come to grasp by the Holy Spirit something of the wonder and the privilege that is yours living at this point in the world's history, recognizing that something happened in Jesus' life, in Jesus' ministry, in Jesus' suffering that is unrepeatable, that has changed the world? Do you understand that when Jesus cried out, "It is finished!" and the finger of God rent that thick veil from top to bottom and all creation experienced an upheaval of sorts, it was a kind of divine fatherly amen of God's creation to that mighty act of redemption? Do you understand that when that happened and when Jesus arose from the dead and ascended into heaven and sent forth his Holy Spirit, that he dismantled forever the old framework of Judaism couched in its civil and ceremonial laws, God brought it all to naught? Even visibly and demonstrably before human eyes with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD together with the temple, it's all banished now, it's done, it's buried in Christ's tomb. It's buried

under the ashes of Jerusalem and we now live in the era of a completed redemption. A Savior who died and shed his blood, who has arisen, who has fulfilled all the types and shadows and prophecies and promises of the Old Testament, fulfilled all the ceremonial laws, to him they all pointed. He is salvation par excellence. Exclusive salvation.

You see, all of this is astonishingly encouraging for genuine believers in Christ today for if you are a true believer, you find your total salvation in Jesus Christ and you rejoice in this New Testament age that you're not just a guest of the bridegroom but you're the very bride of Christ. A Gentile bride married to Christ forever, and that's not just metaphorical language but it's a beautiful joyful reality that is known and felt in the sweet realization that he gives me his righteousness in exchange for my unrighteousness and he takes me to himself, into an eternal bridegroom/bride relationship and grants me an intimate relationship, a touch of a beatific vision of his glory and his beauty, and one day will bring me home to enjoy it all in sin-free perfection forever. Oh, what a joy it is to be a Christian!

So all of this raises the foundational question: are you born again? Have you been made a new creation? Do you know something experientially of the joy of the new wineskin and the new wine of reconciliation as a Gentile with God in the Gospel liberty of Jesus Christ? Is Jesus Christ your Savior, your Lord, your total righteousness, your all-in-all, your treasure, your first love? Is the New Testament administration of the covenant of grace with its new emphasis on preaching the unfettered free Gospel word to every hearer and its new sacraments inexpressibly delightful and precious to you? Despite grieving over your ongoing sin, your indwelling sin, is the predominant note of your life God's rich Gospel in Jesus Christ? Can you say with all your heart the kingdom of God is not in eating and drinking and fasting and doing a whole bunch of rules and following unending traditions, but it is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost? Do you know what it means spiritually to have at least some measure of assurance, if not full assurance through the Gospel that you belong to Christ and he belongs to you? Do you know a normative joy day by day that neither the world nor the Pharisee can ever experience? The joy of knowing God in Jesus Christ? Of trusting in God in Jesus Christ? Of worshiping God in Jesus Christ? Of serving God in Jesus Christ? Of loving God in Jesus Christ all because he first loved me and gave himself for me? And are you cultivating that joy, cultivating the truth of Psalm 5:11, "Let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice. Let them ever shout for joy because thou defendest them. Let them also that love thy name be joyful in thee."

Oh, when Christ fills our life and the wineskins of our lives have great elasticity and the swelling life within us stretches as he pours in his wine of grace, stretches us to new limits and the inner pressure expels all unneeded things and it fills every aspect of our lives and we're overwhelmed with the joy of Jesus and of the Gospel, when Christ by his Spirit takes up residence in our lives, we can scarcely imagine how fully we will be filled, and yet the more we're filled, the more we want to be filled so that every aspect of our humanity from our intellect to our emotions to our heart to our innermost will, would be wholly changed into service, into willing service, to become a willing slave of this

glorious King of kings. So dynamic, you see, is this new life that the old wineskins of previous religious structures must give way for the new wineskin and the new wine.

So our old selves, our previous experiences, our present level of growth, our intellectual formation, our cherished customs, our prejudices, the familiar, the comfortable, apart from Christ, apart from Christ all these things become old wineskins. It's Christ who overturns all these areas of our life and brings us to him. We fall in love not just with an "it" or with a "thing" or with a concept but with a glorious person, the Lord Jesus Christ. He becomes all and in all and we say to him, "Take my intellect, take my customs, take my prejudices, take the familiar, the comfortable, and renew them so as to hold your Gospel wine. I want all I can get of that wine of my Savior."

But maybe you say, "Well, then, are Christians ever sad?" Well, of course they're sad. Of course they're sad. They don't always walk around with happy smiling faces. They grieve when they sin against a God who loves them so much but fundamentally there is a deep-down heart joy, a deep-down heart joy that the world doesn't know. The world can put on a happy face and they might be good at convincing other people they're happy and they might be laughing all the time but inside there's an emptiness. Oh dear young people, dear children, turn to the Lord Jesus Christ. Cast yourself before him with all your sins. You can have that joy too in your young life. Go to him. Go to him. He's on your side. He has your best interest at heart. He comes with the Gospel to you. No, Christians aren't always happy, they're sad when they sin, sometimes they even fall away far from God. Think of David. But he says, "O God, restore unto me the joy, the joy of thy salvation." Deep-down though he lost that joy for a while because of sin, he knew that joy. He knew that joy.

You see, when you're a Christian life doesn't feel right. It doesn't feel right when you lose that joy. You know something's wrong because that joy is such a central part of the Christian life. Joseph Alleine, the Puritan, put it so well, he said, "When I lose that sweet, joyous, daily sense of communion with God, I feel like I'm a bird out of my nest and I'm not content until I'm back in the nest again in my old way of communion with God." Oh, the sweetness of a daily use of the means of grace, a daily drawing near to God, of that regulative, regular, normative, daily, Christian life of joy drinking the wine out of the new wineskin seen more and more every day as you read the Scriptures in the word of God about your Savior, basking in justification, crying out for more sanctification. Oh, there's a sweetness in being a Christian.

Is that your life? Or are you still trying to patch up with an old non-preshrunk patch your old religion? Is your religion one of normative joy or is it like the joyless Pharisee and those disciples of John the Baptist who refused to follow Christ alone and therefore were outside of Jesus' kingdom? Are you trying to win God's favor somehow by adding man-made rules to Scripture? Trying to make it to heaven somehow other than by simple faith in Christ alone? My friend, hear me now because your whole life may depend on you understanding this, your whole eternity may depend on you understanding this: no amount, no amount of your fastings, or your self-denying acts, of your man-made rules and inhibitions, of your joyless appearances and privations, will get you one step closer to

heaven even if you engage in them non-ceasingly all your life. Salvation is in Jesus Christ alone and he's the head of the covenant of grace and he offers himself to you freely, fully, even the greatest of sinners.

So if you die rejecting Jesus Christ as your proffered salvation, you will justly perish forever. You see, you can't have it both ways. Either you by the Spirit's grace are embracing God's way of salvation in his own Son to life eternal and to the marriage feast of the Lamb, or you are embracing man's way to salvation which is the way to damnation through your self-help, your self-efforts, your self-repentance. Repent of your sin from your heart. Repent of your religion from your heart and by God's amazing available grace just throw yourself as a helpless sinner upon Jesus Christ for salvation before it's too late, too late and you'll be lost forever. But if by grace you may cast yourself upon him, you too, then, will experience the new wineskin, the new wine, for Jesus will bring to you a fullness of life, not emptiness, joy, not dullness, for he, himself, himself, is the way, the truth, the life. Amen.

Gracious God, please bless this message. Please help those in this congregation who still do not understand the Gospel to understand it, to believe it, to embrace it, to fall under it, to love it, to live it, to know it, to experience it, to rejoice in it, and grant thy people more and more to live in and through and by and to and out of their precious Savior. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

SUNDAY MORNING

7/2/17

Dr. Joel R. Beuke

Votum and Salutation

Psalter 408

Reading of the Law of God

Scripture Reading: Mark 2:18-22

Prayer

Psalter 357

Sermon Text: Mark 2:18-22

Series on Mark (17)

Fasting, Patches, and Wineskins

1. A challenging question
answered

2. A deeper issue addressed

3. A personal question asked

Psalter 424:1, 4 (standing)

Sermon Conclusion

Closing Prayer

Psalter 264:1-5

Doxology (Psalter 410)

Benediction

SUNDAY MORNING

1. Who was asking the question about fasting in verse 18 and why?

2. How does Jesus respond with (1) a counter-question (v. 19) and (2) a prediction (v. 20)?

3. What deeper issue does Jesus surface in verses 21-22 through two similar parables about patches and wineskins?

4. How are we to understand the relationship between the Old Testament (properly called Old Covenant) and the New Testament (properly called New Covenant)—that is, the old covenant administration of the covenant of grace in the Old Testament and the new covenant administration of the covenant of grace in the New Testament?

5. What personal application do these parables have in store for us?