

## 9:14

**Then came to Him the disciples of John,** John the Baptist. We have a third party of hostile questioners after the scribes (verse 3) and the Pharisees (verse 11).

You say, “Hostile? Whoa, how do you know that? Maybe they’re just inquisitive.”

Well, we might go that they were neutral, but I told you that even though I like to stay in Matthew when we’re preaching in Matthew or teaching in Matthew, reading the other gospels can keep us from making wrong assumptions. And one of those assumptions would be, “Ah, this is just an emotionally neutral party of people that were wondering some things about Jesus and His disciples.” No, do you remember John 3? The disciples of John were upset because people were no longer coming to them to be baptized. They’re going to Jesus. And they said, “Master,” talking to John the Baptist, “All men go to Him.” And John the Baptist used language like this; he said, “I’m the best man. Do you think I’m going to get upset when people are going to the bridegroom?” So, his people are already frustrated.

**saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft,** or often, **but Thy disciples fast not?** Oh, the Pharisees love questions. In verses 10 and 11 the Pharisees are asking questions. Not entirely honest. I mean, we don’t know if the disciples don’t fast. It tells me they had a lot on their plate. Monday they had to follow the disciples around. Tuesday, see Monday. Wednesday looks a lot like Tuesday. “Disciples never fast.” Either they are exaggerating or they need to get a life.

So, let’s talk about the Pharisees and their fasting. You’ve heard Luke 18

*And He spake this parable, Jesus did, unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus [Here’s what I do: I fast twice in the week.]*

## 9:15

**And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn** Maybe in your version it says, “Can the wedding guests mourn?” We see this same language in Ephesians 2’s “children of wrath.” **Children of the bridechamber** are those who belong with the bridal party, those who belong with the bridal procession, those who belong with the bridal ceremony.

Now the question is, why is Jesus making a connection between the fasting that the disciples are not doing and the mourning that they’re not doing? So why were the disciples of John the Baptist mourning? Well, we have a clue. If you look at Matthew 4:4 we get into the temptation of Jesus. Jesus defeats the devil, no surprise to any of us. In 4:11 the devil leaves Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him. In 4:12, Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, He departed into Galilee. So why are they mourning? Probably because he’s in prison.

And then Matthew 14, John the Baptist is at least in prison. In Matthew 14 that didn’t happen, or I should say, didn’t happen on that timeline right then and there; it’s recorded previously.

*Matthew 14:1 At that time Herod the tetrarch heard of the fame of Jesus, And said unto his servants, This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead.*

Well in order for him to be rising from the dead he must to have already had died, or been dead. He’s already dead by the time chapter 14 comes along. He’s in prison in chapter 4. So he’s at least in prison, and possibly—depending on how in order Matthew records the things from chapter 4 through chapter 14—dead. And so why are they fasting? We’re told it’s because they’re mourning, it’s at least because John’s in prison; it’s possible he’s been dead, he’s been killed.

**children of the bridechamber** The Bible is full of wedding terminology: Seven days in a bridal chamber with Jacob, being required of Laban, to fulfill Leah’s week. Wedding coordinators like John in John chapter 3. Wedding guests, here. Wedding feasts. Wedding processions, like the ten virgins. Remember that? The pre-

marriage covenant where Jesus says, “This is the covenant of My blood.” All marriages are covenantal. The best man, we already talked about that. The bridal chamber, which is John 14, “I go to prepare a place for you.” The bride, Ephesians 5. The father of the bride, Paul said, “I have espoused you to another” (2 Corinthians 11:2). The father of the groom would be God the Father.

Now, I don’t want you to become scared. Some of you muscle-men might be thinking, “This is really weird. I don’t want to be married to a man.” At least that used to be what people thought, but we have legislating judges now that said it’s ok. It’s just a way of God relaying to us the union between Christ and His people. It’s like saying “He’s the head and we’re the body.” It’s like saying “He’s the vine and we’re the branches.” It’s like saying “He’s the shepherd and we’re the sheep.” It is just another way of saying we’re one with the Son.

**as long as the bridegroom is with them?** Why would they mourn? And so Jesus associates the fasting of John the Baptist’s disciples and the Pharisees with mourning. So whatever fasting they were talking about, it was a fasting that went with mourning; the type that happens when you are weeping or mourning a loss.

**But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast.** Christ here endorses the principle of Christian fasts. We have religious reasons to feast, rather than **fast**. We call it “fellowship.” We’re obviously expected to fast. You say, “How obvious is it?” Well, it’s obvious enough that in Matthew chapter 6 Jesus says, “When you fast, anoint yourself, and your Father who sees it in secret will reward you openly.” He assumes we would fast. Maybe I can just remind us that some spiritual exercises are not designed for our entertainment.

And some fasting should perhaps be incidental, like, “I’m so distraught that I haven’t thought about eating,” and that is probably why there is a connection here to mourning. From the disciples’ perspective, Jesus is here prophesying of a time directly when He would leave them and there would be occasion to mourn, and surely one weekend there was reason to mourn. And now, there are times when we mourn, and this is not beyond the realm of possibility for a believer, for in Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount Jesus says, “Blessed are those who mourn.” You’re not less of a Christian if you mourn. But at a wedding, people are happy; they’re eating. So it made no sense for the disciples of Jesus to spend time mourning and fasting while the bridegroom is with them.

This is the first time we see of Jesus referring to a wedding, a groom, a bride. Why is He doing it? Well, let’s see if we can get in the mind of the writer one more time here. He’s quoted the Old Testament several times through this gospel, but he is now for the second time this chapter referring to the book of Hosea. The first was just a verse or two previous (verse 13). That is a direct quotation out of Hosea chapter 6. Here—two verses later—Jesus calls Himself something that was referred to in Hosea chapter 2. When He says that He is the bridegroom, think of the connection that makes in the mind of the Pharisee. For it was Jehovah God who said in Hosea chapter 2, “You will call Me your husband.”

And so here is Jesus, as if it wasn’t already in your face enough this chapter, He claims to be the Son of Man. He can read your thoughts. He says He can forgive your sins. He just told the wind to shut-up. He just sent the raging waves to the beach. He’s done everything that you would expect the Creator God to do. He’s healed with His voice. Out of His mouth men live by every word. And now, now, as if that’s not enough, He claims to be Jehovah by taking a reference in Hosea and applying it to Himself. “I am the Jehovah of Hosea 2 and you are My wife.”

**The children of the bridechamber mourn when the bridegroom leaves them.** Has the bridegroom left us? Is He in heaven today? Well it’s expected then. And of course here He’s probably speaking more specifically of His death.

## 9:16

**No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse.** In other words, the hole reappears because the new cloth hasn’t shrunk yet. The new cloth shrinks and the hole that you are trying to patch, is worsened.

**9:17**

**Neither do men put new wine into old bottles: else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved.** Animal skins. Jesus is talking about the skins of an animal expanding. Well, if you take an old skin that is already expanded and you put new wine into it that hasn't expanded, once it expands the bottle breaks because the skin is not going to stretch anymore.

Jesus is saying, "Your old system is like an old garment with a new patch. It's like an old bottle with new wine. It's just not going to fit." So in relation to this passage of Scripture, and at the risk of seeming maybe just a little introspective, and perhaps reflective, our past religiosity of compartmentalized Christianity does not hold an appreciation for the internal, ongoing work of Jesus. We have decided that, "I cannot really be drastically effected anymore." And so often we take our old skins and we ask Jesus to fill them. Our current religion seldom leaves room for new work that Christ wants to do, seeks to do. Our invitation time usually starts with 30 people getting in the aisles and heading towards the door as if you cannot wait another five minutes.

But the one I fear the most is that we take our current religion and hinder the blossoming, expanding, flourishing work of Christ. Certainly not you. But maybe? Maybe sometimes? Do we take religion and cram Jesus into it and ask Him to bless it. So, here's what this looks like. It looks like a perspective of sermons becoming "good studies."

"Well that was a great study. What are y'all studying on Sunday nights?"

"We're preaching through Ephesians." "Oh that's a great study."

"What are you doing on Sunday mornings?"

"Preaching through 1<sup>st</sup> Peter."

"That's a great study." "What are you guys doing on Tuesday morning with the ladies?"

"Oh, we're watching..."

"Oh, that's a great study."

Study, study, study, study, study. You think we need more education?

Friends, I'm not saying we shouldn't be learning. I am saying that I'm afraid that's all we see sometimes, is another opportunity to learn. And all the while, the new wine is expanding. Studies are cute, intellectually stimulating in our eyes. We become smarter. We actually become more skilled. We love apologetics studies because then we become even skilled with how to cut people up with what we know. Sermons become optional. Services become optional. Pastors become kind of paid service providers for after hours services, and if I decide not to come on a Sunday night I can still call you on Monday for counseling.

"I mean, we had to have family time. We're going on a vacation."

Yes, meanwhile you're bothered because your family is sometimes a wreck. When maybe what we needed to hear was going on in here. We excuse our sin: We kind of disguise gossip as "just letting you know." We rename backstabbing as "just trying to warn you." We call inordinate affection "window shopping." Bottom line: we really never take the spat with the spouse, the loss of a loved one, the unfortunate family separation, the demotion or promotion, in light of last night's sermon. "Why you being so specific?" I'm finding that we don't have a style of looking at everything in our lives through the lens of what God just preached to us at the last worship service. So ask yourself, "When was the last time I left a message and thought, 'I need to go pray. I need to call so-and-so and ask for forgiveness. I need to quit making excuses in this area. I need to adjust my schedule.'" And then we actually do it! When was the last time?

I'm afraid we often think everything requires deliberation and mass seasons of prayer; tabling the matter. We consider whether things are worthy of repentance. Sin is not something to be feared and fled, or

better, saved from. Sin becomes something we contemplate. We become slow to turn the television off, slow to throw away certain DVDs, slow to delete music that dishonors the Lord, slow to close a browser, slow to unfollow a person on social media that misuses the Lord's name. We become slow about everything! And the bag, the bottle, bursts!

All the while, we had before us a fisherman who heard an invitation for immediate action, disciples who immediately got into a boat, wind and waves who gave immediate response, demons who immediately exited two demoniacs, a palsied man who heard an immediate invitation and took immediate action, a tax collector that heard an invitation for immediate action, and got up immediately and left his money for everyone else to collect and made a dinner almost immediately for all of his friends. Immediacy in every way! In every way: immediacy! But we...we put it on layaway.

I fear that the longer we take to do this the more we are like Pharisees and John the Baptist's disciples. We are hoping that last week's religion takes it all. The old way.

"I haven't learned anything in 20 years. I believe now what I believed last year."

You are an old bottle.

"I do now what I've done for 10 years and you're not changing me."

You're getting ready to break.

"I'm not changing. Tradition! Tradition!"

You're getting ready to break. The old way of doing things, the old bottles, the old wineskins, they're simply not fit for God's work.