

Inappropriate and Incompatible (Luke 5:33-39)

Summary:

- Led into the wilderness by the power of the Holy Spirit (4:1), Jesus resisted the devil's temptation and proved that He is primarily the second and greater Adam and secondarily a type of Israel, faithful, where she failed. Both Adam and Israel were "first-born" of God (Ex. 4:22; 16: 34:1-14 Lk. 3:22).
- Returning in the power of the Holy Spirit to Nazareth, Jesus read and expounded Isaiah 61:1-2. His arrival is akin to the Year of Jubilee with a spiritual overtone: He has come to give sight to the blind, release the captives, and proclaim the "year" of the Lord's favor (Lk. 4:18-19).
- In a demonstration of His deity and anointing, Jesus confirmed His authority: over demons (4:31-35), disease (4:38-41), creation (5:1-7), to make clean (5:12-16), and to forgive sins (5:17-26).

As Jesus of Nazareth releases captives, proclaims the year of the Lord's favor, and gives sight to the blind, He is upsetting the religious establishment.

1. The Appropriate Time to Fast and Pray (v.33-35)

- Jesus is approached by "people" on why His disciples are not fasting and praying.
 - Depending on the location of this interaction, it could be the disciples of John, the disciples of the Pharisees, the sinners and tax collectors at the table (v.29) or at a future time close to the previous account (v.29).
- This interaction is not surprising, as Luke builds suspense between the religious establishment and Jesus, since they previously confronted Him on His authority to forgive sins (v.17-26) and his friendship with sinners.
- This interaction is thematically connected to the previous account. Both have to do with what is appropriate within certain boundaries and what is acceptable. The Pharisees do not think it is right for Jesus to eat and associate with sinners.
- While the Pharisees disliked John the Baptist and his disciples, they shared common ground as legalists and traditionalists.
- While there were points of agreement between the disciples of John the Baptist, the Pharisees, and Jesus on the necessity of repentance, faith, and holiness, they could not find common ground on outward and public manifestations of it.

Fasting:

- Fasting was observed during the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29-34) and could last for three days (Esth. 4:16), one week (1 Sam. 31:13), or three weeks (Dan. 10:2-3). Moses, Elijah, and Jesus fasted for forty days (Ex. 34:28; 1 Kgs. 19:8; Lk. 4:2), which was unusual.
- It was done during times of mourning (2 Sam. 1:12) as a sign of repentance for sin (2 Sam. 12:22; 1 Kgs. 21:27). Fasting was also done during traumatic times in Israel (Zech. 7:5; 8:19).
- As the nation of Israel descended into sin and unbelief, the LORD rebuked them for the hypocrisy of fasting that was not accompanied by justice and mercy (Isa. 58:3-9; Jer. 14:12; Zech. 7:5-6; Joel 2:12-13).
- While exiled in Babylon, due to a lack of sacrificial systems, the opinion arose that fasting was meritorious and gained favor with men before God.
- Fasting was a well-known practice by the Jews, associated with repentance and sorrow for sin. By the time of Jesus, it became a fixed practice. The Pharisees fasted twice per week (Monday and Thursday, (Lk. 18:12)), and John's disciples probably did the same.
- Some would whiten their faces, wear dusty clothes, and refuse to wash. The superstition was that you could not be spiritual or holy if you were comfortable.

Prayer:

- The Jews offered ritualistic prayers at noon, 3, and 6 pm.
- Jesus fasted on at least one occasion (Matt. 4:2) and privately, according to his teaching (Matt. 6:16-18). The Jews frequently fasted, prayed, and gave alms to display piety (Matt. 6:1-18).
- While the early church observed fasting (Acts 9:9; 14:23), it was voluntary.

2. The Inappropriate Time to Fast and Pray (v.34)

- Previously, Jesus compared himself to a "physician" (v.31) and now a "bridegroom."
- The bridegroom is not a metaphor or allusion typically used in the Old Testament to describe the relationship between YHWH and Israel. Instead, it is of a husband who loves his unfaithful wife (Isa. 5:1; 54:5-6; 62:4-5; Jer. 2:2; Ezek. 16:6-8; Hos. 2:19).
- Jewish marriage ceremonies were one week for a virgin bride and three days for a remarried widow. Instead of departing for the honeymoon, the "newlyweds" would have an open house of celebration for a week with abundant food, wine, singing, and dancing.
- All guests had no responsibilities other than to enjoy the festivities.
- The Rabbis were expected to suspend the Torah instruction and celebrate with their students. It is a celebration! It is not appropriate to fast at a wedding.

Jesus alludes to His future arrest, as He (bridegroom) will be taken away (v.35). The fasting "in those days" will be when Jesus is taken (violently) away to be scourged and crucified. This may also be an allusion to the Church Age, as she awaits the return of Her Groom (Rom. 8:17-30; 1 Cor. 15:20-28; Rev. 19:19).

3. The Incompatibility of Human Tradition with the Gospel (v.36-39)

Jesus has used one illustration with feasting and fasting and now provides three additional ones:

- A. A new clothing patch cannot be sewn on an old garment (v.36): the stitching will tear if a new patch is sewn on an old garment.
- B. New wine cannot be placed in old wineskins (v.37): The wineskin would often be the neck of a goat or sheep that holds wine.
- C. New wine must be placed in new wineskin (v.38): As new wine ages and fermentation releases gases, the wineskin must be flexible to accommodate the changes. If new wine is placed in an old wineskin, the skin will burst, ruining the skin and the wine.

- The context of the wedding feast would provide a natural analogy to the garment, wine, and wineskin. The clothing of the bride and groom is new, which pictures the believer clothed in garments of salvation (Isa. 61:10). Wine gladdens the heart (Ps. 104:15; Eccl. 10:19), which is a picture of the joy experienced during the weeklong celebration, while the new wineskin and wine is a picture of the new creation (2 Cor. 5:17).
- Jesus is alluding to the New Covenant, which contains both continuity and discontinuity of the Old Covenant. This will be expounded through the future revelation of Scripture through the teaching of Jesus and His apostles.
- Jesus demonstrates the difficulty that many will face while enjoying the "wine" of the traditions of men (prayer and fasting) and the realization of the "shadows" of the Mosaic legislation that will be fulfilled in the substance of Christ (v.39).
- The gospel and kingdom of God cannot be mixed with man-made traditions or Judaism (Acts 15; Gal. 2:11-21; 4:3-5; Phil. 3:2-14). Both "wine and wineskin" will break.
- Jesus invites those who questioned His practices to celebrate with His disciples by abandoning their man-made traditions. They enjoy the old (v.39). Will they embrace the new?