

Feasting and Fasting at the Dawn of a New Day

Introduction

The Text

³³ And they said to him, “The disciples of John fast often and offer prayers, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours eat and drink.” ³⁴ And Jesus said to them, “Can you make wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? ³⁵ The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days.” ³⁶ He also told them a parable: “No one tears a piece from a new garment and puts it on an old garment. If he does, he will tear the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old. ³⁷ And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed. ³⁸ But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins. ³⁹ And no one after drinking old wine desires new, for he says, ‘The old is good.’” (Luke 5:33–39)

- A. We must not miss the fact that the conversation which composes our text this morning takes place as Jesus is still sitting around the table, feasting with tax collectors and sinners: “And Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them” (v. 29).
 - 1. While Jesus is feasting with these kinds of people, the more serious Jews and their leaders are seething.
- B. Seeing as it is this feast that still sits in the background of our text even this morning, I shall delineate my headings in relation to it: (1) Feasting unto Repentance (vv. 29-32); (2) Feasting with the Bridegroom (vv. 33-35); (3) Feasting in the New Day (vv. 36-39); and (4) Feasting and Yet Fasting.

(1) Feasting unto Repentance (vv. 29-32)

- A. We’ve been talking for the last two weeks now about what we’ve called Jesus’ and Levi’s table strategy—how they used the table strategically to advance the mission and kingdom of God—to both reveal and reinforce redemption.
 - 1. Before we move into a discussion of our text proper for this morning, there is one last thing I wanted to bring out from our text last time.
- B. Though this meal is a sign of intimacy and fellowship, it ends with a call to repentance: “³⁰ And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, ‘Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?’” ³¹ And Jesus answered them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ³² I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance” (vv. 30–32).

- C. This call to repentance is what we must not miss. The meal Jesus shares with these people does not represent wholesale, unprincipled acceptance or tolerance of their sin. No! He's feasting with them as a way of leading them to repentance!
 - 1. Jesus has this way of both accepting the sinner and convicting them, of both calling us in and calling us out. He loves us in our sin, make no mistake about that: "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8). But He loves us too much to leave us there.
 - a. So He feasts with us in our sin that we might taste something of His love, and then He calls us to turn from our sin that we might taste even more. It truly is His kindness that leads to repentance (Rom 2:4).

- D. I love this! Because it seems to me that we are so often good at either one side of this equation or the other.
 - 1. Either we are good at accepting and befriending the sinner, but we never get the courage to call them out; or we are good at calling them out and never can find a way to be friends with someone so "sick" and "depraved". Some of us call in but never call out. Others of us call out but never call in.
 - a. But Jesus does both. And He does it around the table. He feasts with people unto repentance. Do we?

(2) Feasting with the Bridegroom (vv. 33-35)

Longing for Deliverance

- A. Whoever these people are that approach Christ next in our story (it's a bit unclear when we compare the parallel accounts in Matthew and Mark), one thing is clear: they don't like this feasting that they see.
 - 1. The first objection in vv. 30-32 came with reference to who Jesus was feasting with.
 - 2. But now in v. 33 we see that they are objecting to the fact that Jesus is even feasting at all: "And they said to him, 'The disciples of John fast often and offer prayers, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours eat and drink.'"

- B. Fasting, at bottom, is an expression of longing for God's deliverance in one way or another. That's why it is coupled with "offer[ing] prayers" in v. 33 of our text. The Greek word chosen for prayer here literally means "to beg" God for something.
 - 1. So fasting, as I've come to define it, is a physical exclamation point put at the end of our spiritual sentences: "God I want your deliverance, and I want it this bad!"
 - a. When the last time you prayed so fervently that you felt you must accent it with fasting?

- C. At this time in Israel's history, it is assumed that much of their fasting and prayers were offered as an expression of their longing for deliverance from Roman occupation: "O God, because of our sin, You exiled us to foreign lands. When You brought us back under Zerubbabel we had high hopes. But now, over 500 years later, we're still in exile, only now it's in our own land! O God, deliver us from Rome and vindicate Your name!"
1. This is what John and His disciples were longing for. This is what the Pharisees and their disciples were longing for. And this is why they are all so confused and troubled by the feasting—not fasting—of Jesus and His disciples.
 - a. "You're a 'glutton and a drunkard' (Luke 7:34), and You're teaching Your disciples to be gluttons and drunkards too. How can you eat and drink, feast, when the Holy Land of Israel is occupied by the enemy? Who has the nerve to celebrate in such a time as this? Where is the fasting, where is the praying, where is the longing for deliverance?"

Deliverance Is Here!

- A. To which Jesus responds: "We are no longer longing for deliverance, because deliverance is here!" "Can you make wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them?" (v. 35).
1. He takes us into the imagery of celebration, of a wedding—which, in His day, the party would go on for seven days straight. And He's saying: "It would be an offense to fast at a time of feasting!"
- B. But there is a hidden glory to what He just said. In countless OT texts, do you want to know who the Bridegroom and Husband of Israel is? YHWH!
1. And here Jesus is saying: "I am the Bridegroom, I am the Husband, I am YHWH! And I've come to bring the end-time deliverance and kick off the end-time celebration you've been longing for!"
- C. To give you a sense of the OT background for this, let me read to you from Hos 2. Speaking to Hosea of Israel, God says: "² 'Plead with your mother, plead— for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband— that she put away her whoring from her face, and her adultery from between her breasts . . . ^{5b} For she said, 'I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.' . . . ⁸ [S]he did not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the wine, and the oil, and who lavished on her silver and gold, which they used for Baal [Canaanite storm god]. ⁹ Therefore I will take back my grain in its time, and my wine in its season, and I will take away my wool and my flax, which were to cover her nakedness. ¹⁰ Now I will uncover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, and no one shall rescue her out of my hand. ¹¹ And I will put an end to all her mirth, her feasts, her new moons, her Sabbaths, and all her appointed feasts. ¹² And I will lay waste her vines and her fig trees, of which she said, 'These are my wages, which my lovers have given me.' I will make them a forest, and the beasts of the field shall devour them. ¹³ And I will punish her for the feast days of the Baals when she burned offerings to them and adorned herself with her ring and jewelry, and went after her lovers and forgot me, declares the Lord. [And then He just pivots in mercy...]

¹⁴ “Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. ¹⁵ And there I will give her her vineyards and make the Valley of Achor [trouble] a door of hope. And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt.

¹⁶ “And in that day, declares the Lord, you will call me ‘My Husband,’ and no longer will you call me ‘My Baal.’ ¹⁷ For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be remembered by name no more. ¹⁸ And I will make for them a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the creeping things of the ground. And I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety. ¹⁹ And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. ²⁰ I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the Lord” (vv. 2, 5b, 8–20).

1. Israel is on the brink of exile for her adultery. And with these words God holds out hope for the latter days, for the end-time when God Himself would come yet again for His adulterous wife and re-covenant Himself to her in marriage.

- a. At that time mirth, joy, celebration, feasting will commence once more!

D. And Jesus is saying: “All of that is arriving in Me! Therefore, when I am present, fasting is rendered utterly irrational, inconceivable. It would be an offense to fast at a time of feasting!” “Can you make wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them?” (v. 35).

E. O brothers and sisters, what does it say about our God that His presence is a party?! Do we know Him like that? Are we feasting with Him? Have we entered in to the assurance and joy that is ours in Him?

1. To be sure, we are the adulterers, the idolaters. But the Bridegroom has come in grace to betroth us to Himself in righteousness, and justice, and steadfast love, and mercy, and faithfulness...forever!

It All Goes Dark

A. But where Jesus goes next, it’s almost as if the party is hopping, the music is blaring, the lights are flashing, and then He just pulls the plug...and it all goes dark: “The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days” (v. 35).

1. The imagery is jarring! Why is the Bridegroom being ripped away from His own wedding?!

B. Certainly this saying was a bit enigmatic to His original audience. But it is O so painfully clear to us. He’s talking about the cross. He’s talking about the day when the Bride will turn on the Bridegroom once again: “Crucify Him!”

1. But our great act of betrayal is His great act of mercy: “²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish” (Eph 5:25–27).

- a. The Bridegroom is blessing even while we are betraying! He takes my betrayal of Him and uses it to beautify me! As we crucify Him, He is dying for our sins—so that our garments can be washed white in the blood of the Lamb. O what a Bridegroom we have in Christ!
- C. So let me ask you husband: Is that your/my approach to marriage? “I will bless you, beautify you, wash you even if it costs me my life!”

(3) Feasting in the New Day (vv. 36-39)

Two Parables

- A. Jesus proceeds to give these objectors even deeper rationale for His feasting with sinners and tax collectors by drawing their attention to the new day that is dawning in Him. He gives two parables, or pictures, to get at this point: “³⁶ No one tears a piece from a new garment and puts it on an old garment. If he does, he will tear the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old. ³⁷ And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed. ³⁸ But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins” (vv. 36-38).
1. In the first parable, we’re trying to repair an old garment by tearing a piece from a new one and patching it on. This will essentially destroy both garments. For you destroy the new one by cutting a piece from it, and you destroy the old one because the piece from the new garment you patched onto it will shrink when you wash it and end up tearing the old garment even further.
 2. In the second parable, the meaning is the same, but the picture is different. Old wineskins would lose their elasticity and get brittle. New wines, still fermenting, would stretch and expand those old wineskins until they burst. Both the old wineskin and the new wine would be destroyed.
- B. The old in these parables is Judaism, and the old covenant under Moses. The new is that which Christ is initiating in His person and work.
1. These pictures remind us that what Jesus is doing isn't just repairing the old structures, the old forms, of Judaism. He is moving us forward in the plan of redemption into something deeper, fuller, ultimate, spiritual—something new.
 - a. To be sure the new is connected to the old but what Jesus is emphasizing here is the fundamental discontinuity as he moves us from the symbols and shadows of Israel into the final forms of his kingdom and church.

Two Examples

- A. Perhaps the clearest example of such a move is found when on the day of his death, as He was breathing His last, “the curtain of the temple was torn in two” (Luke 23:45).

1. The old forms cannot stand after the final forms have been initiated. He's not come to merely patch up the temple. He's come to break out of it! The physical temple at that point is over, rendered irrelevant. Jesus shifts the center of gravity towards the heavenly and spiritual realities to which all this stuff in Israel was pointing.
 - a. All that the temple stood for is fulfilled and carried forward in Him in a new way.
 - i. He is the temple torn down and rebuilt in three days.
 - ii. His skin is the veil, and as it is ripped open sinners young and old Jew and Gentile will all have access through Him into the holy presence of God.
 - iii. And in Him, by way of his Holy Spirit, the church—not a building, but a people—become the temple of the living God—His presence with us and in us.

- B. To help us understand this further, there is only one other place in Luke's gospel where Jesus specifically refers to what He's doing as "new".
 1. The night He was betrayed, around the table, speaking of His impending death: "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:20). The new covenant.

- C. This is a clear reference to Jer 31 where God, looking out over a stubborn and hard-hearted people says: "³¹Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, ³²not 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. ³³For 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" (vv. 31–33).
 1. Here is the "new" thing that Christ has come to inaugurate! He's come to take the law that was always coming at us from the outside on tablets of stone, and put it inside of us by His Spirit, so that it starts to come out of my heart!
 - a. God, in Christ, has come to stay my rebellion and turn me back to Him. The Son was crushed so that His Spirit could be poured out upon me, and I could be made new—rivers of living water flowing out of me.
 - i. As Paul would write in Rom 7:4–6: "⁴[Y]ou . . . have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God. ⁵For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. ⁶But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code."

- D. So Jesus can't just fix Judaism, Israel. He's not just patching up old garments. He's not putting new wine into old wineskins. He's breaking out of these things and taking us into the new day of God's Spirit.

Addition or Regeneration?

A. But we must stop and ask ourselves a critical question at this point: Have we merely added Jesus to our lives—like a new patch on an old garment; like new wine in an old receptacle? We make a little room for Him in our busy schedules so long as He promises to serve our agenda. We go to church and scratch His back on Sunday, but only if He'll scratch ours throughout the week.

1. Are we merely adding Christ to our lives? Or is Christ our life?

B. We do not become Christians by addition, but by regeneration. We let Him have us at a fundamental level. We die with Him and we rise in Him. Or we're just playing games.

(4) Feasting and Yet Fasting

A. But now, if Christ is your life, if you've died and risen with Him, if He's made you new, how come we so often still feel so old?

1. I'm supposed to have rivers of living water flowing through me? Why do I feel like California two months ago, before we got all this rain: dried up, parched. You turn the faucet on and it just groans like it's in pain just trying to release water.

a. Does your life ever feel like that? I thought we are people of the new way, people of the new day, people of the Spirit! What am I supposed to do with that?!

B. For this, I'd direct us back to those words I didn't deal with up in v. 35: "The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days."

C. Brothers and sisters, this text reminds us that though Christ has begun this new work, it is not yet completed. We live in those days where fasting is yet again appropriate because Christ our Bridegroom has been taken away.

1. We live in the time between His two comings. It's as if we've been betrothed to Him but have not yet consummated the marriage in full. It's as if the new day has dawned in Him, but the sun's not yet reached high noon.

a. And so, consequently, we live in a time both of feasting and of fasting.

i. We feast because Christ has risen victorious, because our salvation is sure, because our God will complete the good work He's begun in us in Christ.

ii. But we fast because Christ is hidden from our eyes, because He has not yet put every enemy under His feet, because the flesh still wages war against the Spirit and we still carry the burden of this body of death.

D. So we celebrate and we grieve. We sing and we cry. We feast and we fast...until He comes again.