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Mark 2:18-22 Jesus is Questioned about Fasting

Discussion: We accept some new things quite readily, while others are harder to adopt.

Which old ways of doing things habits would you find hard to let go of?

Mark 2	Matthew 9	Luke 5
<p>Jesus Questioned About Fasting 18 Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. Some people came and asked Jesus,</p>	<p>Jesus Questioned About Fasting 14 Then John's disciples came and asked him,</p>	<p>Jesus Questioned About Fasting 33 They said to him,</p>
<p>"How is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?"</p>	<p>"How is it that we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?"</p>	<p>"John's disciples often fast and pray, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours go on eating and drinking."</p>
<p>19 Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them. 20 But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast.</p>	<p>15 Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast.</p>	<p>34 Jesus answered, "Can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? 35 But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; in those days they will fast."</p>
<p>21 "No one sews a patch of un-shrunk cloth on an old garment. Otherwise, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse.</p>	<p>16 "No one sews a patch of un-shrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse.</p>	<p>36 He told them this parable: "No one tears a piece out of a new garment to patch an old one. Otherwise, they will have torn the new garment, and the patch from the new will not match the old.</p>
<p>22 And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins."</p>	<p>17 Neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved."</p>	<p>37 And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. 38 No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins. 39 And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for they say, 'The old is better.'"</p>

Comparison

- Mark and Matthew refer to John the Baptist's disciples and the Pharisees as engaged in fasting; in Luke this is more clearly located at Levi's banquet, continuing a dialogue between the Pharisees/scribes and Jesus.

Bible Study of Mark's Gospel

- It is therefore appropriate that (in the setting of a celebratory banquet) all three gospels record Jesus using the metaphor of a bridegroom at a wedding; it is a time for joy and celebration, not fasting.¹⁹ Jesus is not dismissing fasting, he's just saying "not yet".²⁰
- The example of sewing a patch of new material into an old garment, and of pouring new wine into old wineskins explains how both the old and the new would be ruined.²¹ Matt 9:17 concludes that by keeping the two apart, both old and new are preserved.

Context

- the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) is considered the Sabbath of Sabbaths, the only day of the Jewish calendar on which fasting was required; a day of repentance and "making amends". Fasting was mandatory for the entire population (Ex. 20:10, Lev 16:1-34).²²
- Voluntary fasting would be undertaken in circumstances such as the death of a loved one, recovery from illness, repentance, and so on (Neh. 9:1, Esth. 9:31, Zech. 7:5). Fasting was from dawn to dusk.²³ The Jewish calendar is otherwise full of feasts and festivals.
- Religious groups could use fasting as an expression of piety; some Pharisees fasted every Monday and Thursday (Luke 18:12).²⁴ Twice weekly is far beyond OT requirements.²⁵

Key Points

- The accusation is that Jesus and his disciples are not pious enough.
- The bridegroom will be "taken away" (it implies *violence*); Jesus won't simply *depart*.²⁶
- God's relationship with Israel is often portrayed as a groom and his bride (Isaiah 54:4-7, Jer. 2:2). This is not a picture of how they viewed their Messiah, only Yahweh.²⁷
- Jesus implies that the old and new don't mix very well, it is not possible to 'shoe-horn' the new into the old system. For example, there is now a new understanding of how sins are forgiven, and ritualistic purity through rites, observances, food laws, and avoiding uncleanness are made obsolete. The old ways cannot 'contain' Jesus. His followers must be prepared to 'break free' of the old ways. You can't do both – stay with the old or go with the new.²⁸

Discussion: The marriage ceremony is used as a metaphor throughout the NT, with Jesus as the Bridegroom and the church is his Bride. How does this imagery strike you?