

## **Mark 2:18-22 The Bridegroom and New Wine The Pharisees**

The Scribes and Pharisees who would not allow these Tax Collectors and Sinners to have a relationship with God certainly weren't going to have an open mind about Jesus' methods of training His disciples. The scribes and pharisees were upset because Jesus and His disciples hadn't demonstrated their piety to them, and accepted their judgement of what was worthy service and sacrifice to God; they hadn't conformed to their system, and that's what the real problem was. Fasting, as a religious observance, was prescribed in the Law only once in the year, on the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, designated as a day for cleansing from sin and affliction of the soul (Ex. 20:10; Lev. 16:1–34; 23:26–32; 35:9; Num. 29:9–11. When our hearts are right before the Lord, and the fasting is for repentance, for abasement or denial of self to get close to God, or to spend time with God without the distraction of every-day activities, God seems to support fasting as a discipline. But, when it becomes empty tradition, or when it becomes a "burden", or a joyless observance, that's when God says something like "then, why bother?". And this is the position that most of the Pharisees were in. The traditional code of the rabbis had multiplied this out to many days of fasting. Twice in the week was the boast of the Pharisee. Originally, it was an expression of piety and self-consecration, but it had long-since turned into an empty "tradition" by which they excluded everyone who did not play along. In other words, they made something that was supposed to be all about getting closer to God, all about themselves!

### ***The disciples of John***

John's disciples were probably fasting in a spirit of asceticism, the mortification of the body, characteristic of both John the Baptist, and His teaching. These disciples had submitted to the baptism of repentance and continued to pattern their lives in accordance with John's prophetic word. In all probability many of them had been disciples of John who were expected to maintain the discipline encouraged by their master. And, so these disciples of John, and those of the Pharisees were fasting for very different reasons. Their fast as an expression of repentance designed specifically to hasten the coming of the time of redemption—but Jesus was here to tell them that this day had already come, and that the time to be joyful was at hand.

**19 And Jesus said to them, "While the groom is with them, the attendants of the groom cannot fast, can they? As long as they have the groom with them, they cannot fast."**

Jesus' answer to them is not saying that they shouldn't fast, it's saying that right now He is with them, and showing them personally that God will supply all of their needs, and that they should be joyful at this wonderful provision of God for them of their Messiah, and the Kingdom of God that He is presenting to them. It's a time for celebration, not for self-affliction. To Everything There Is A Season. And, it was the season for celebrating the Messiah's arrival, and the New Covenant that He was going to be initiating in His Blood. The bridegroom Jesus was gathering up His Bride, the Church. Weddings are times for festivity, not fasting. Entry into the kingdom of God is compared to admission to a wedding feast several times in scripture. In Matthew. 22:1–14 we read of the Kingdom of God being compared to a wedding feast, where those who were originally invited were unworthy. So, we see that the Scribes and Pharisees who did not want to approach Jesus in the way that He had prescribed, through Jesus His Son, but instead chose to try to come in another way in self-righteousness were destroyed as sons of iniquity. And even those who were invited, but did not conform their lives to the example of Jesus, actually following Him, did not have the righteous acts of the saints that are termed clean, white linen. ; Also Matthew 25:1–13, Rev. 19:7–9 **7 Let's rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, because the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His bride has prepared herself." 8 It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.**

John the Baptist taught his disciples this as well, and so Jesus' imagery of the wedding feast, as the joyful occasion that all believers in Him are looking forward to must have rang a bell to John's disciples. John 3:29 '29 **He who has the bride is the groom; but the friend of the groom, who stands and listens to him, rejoices greatly because of the groom's voice. So this joy of mine has been made full.** And John's disciples must have understood what Jesus was trying to tell them, because some of John's disciples became Jesus' disciples. The wedding imagery suggests a sense of new beginnings, and of a new relationship established with the people of God, and it especially conveys the joy and exhilaration of this new situation. But the focus in all these verses is not on the wedding but on the bridegroom; it is Jesus himself who is the source of joy. Jesus describes the Joy that should be evident among His disciples at the coming of the Messiah, this was something that they were all familiar with. The bridegroom's best men, or "The sons of the bridechamber" were friends of the bridegroom, whose duty it was to provide for the wedding whatever was necessary. To fast in the presence of the groom would be unthinkable. So, while fasting is technically still possible, it's not appropriate, or desired by God at that time. It was not time to fast, but to rejoice! The Bridegroom comes to gather His Bride.

**20 But the days will come when the groom is taken away from them, and then they will fast, on that day.**

Jesus is both the center and the cause of the joy that his disciples experience. Yet this will change. Jesus referred to a period when the bridegroom would be taken away and then his disciples would understand the meaning of sorrow. This has been recognized from earliest Christian times to refer to the time of Jesus' suffering and death on the cross; but of course that hadn't yet been revealed to the disciples, so they must have wondered what Jesus meant by that. They would find out "on that day"—then will be the time for them to fast.

**21 "No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; otherwise, the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear results.**

Remember that this is long before the days of pre-shrunk clothing. Clothing made of cotton, linen or similar materials gets smaller when it is washed, so an un-shrunk cloth that is placed on one that has been shrunk will pull away, once it is washed. This parable has a broader application than the narrow issue of fasting.

**22 And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost and the skins as well; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins."**

Both John the Baptist and Jesus understood that God was doing a new thing with the coming of Jesus, and that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. But, the old, ridged, set in their ways, self-righteous Pharisees were not going to be able to accept this—they liked their self-righteousness in trying to keep the law. Very few were able to make the transition that Paul did, from dying to the old life trying to be saved by works, and being born again to a New Life in Christ. Most Pharisees just couldn't do it. And, so Jesus is letting everyone know that this new thing was going to be more wonderful, but harder to accept at first. Luke 5:39 **"And no one after drinking old wine wants new, for they say, 'The old is better.'" This verse emphasizes the preference for the familiar over the new.** In order to preserve both the correct teaching of the New Testament, and in order to preserve those who will be sending it forth as Jesus' disciples, as Matthew 9:17 says **"Nor do they put new wine into old wineskins, or else the wineskins break, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But they put new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved."** This verse illustrates the preservation of both the wine and the wineskins when new wine is used.

Jesus, came proclaiming that the time was fulfilled, that the Kingdom of God is at hand, and it is His presence which is the decisive element of fulfilment—but those who preferred the Old Wine were not going to accept it. But for those who did, such as His disciples, they got to experience the Joyful certainty of wonderful work of salvation that God was doing. They experience the joy of the

Kingdom because they belong to Him. We no longer keep wine in wineskins, so we forget what happens. Wineskins were made of leather, which was at first soft and pliable, but which perished and became brittle with constant use. They were then liable to burst under the pressure of fermentation if used repeatedly for fermentation. Unfortunately, the skins also rot with age, and the new wine, as it ferments, bursts them.

Once again we see that the old religion of the Pharisees is incompatible with Christianity. The general teaching is that the new teachings and the old forms do not belong together. These two parables both serve to illustrate the folly of trying to contain the new within the confines of the old. The fossilized religion of the Pharisees was simply not flexible enough to contain the wonder, and newness of Jesus' radical message of the kingdom of God, and our ability to have a personal relationship with the God of the Universe, made possible by His sacrifice on the Cross.