

Weddings are for joy, not for sorrow, for feasting, not for fasting, for celebration, not for severity

Luke continues to reveal the opposition to Jesus (5 stories in a row)

## 1. Religion is a Way of Comparing Our Righteousness

- a. Religion (seeing oneself as inherently *righteous*) is the drawing a line between good and bad, “big” sins and “little” sins, of seeing oneself as “righteous” because of his/her avoidance of the big sins or success at good works (fasting)
- b. Drawing this dividing line (religion) between big sins and little sins is not just the way organized religion works, it is the way that the heart works
  - i. “Those people are what’s wrong with the world”
    1. Religious or irreligious think the same way
  - ii. The only difference between a conservative worldview and a liberal worldview is where you draw the line between the “big” sins and the “little” sins
    1. Ecology or Economy; Social Care or Individual Freedom; Beavers or Ducks
- c. All religion is really a means of wanting to justify ourselves before God (or whatever gains you power in your life) and others.
  - i. Making God or others owe me through my obedience to the law, my sacrifices
    1. We feel that our sacrifices for God and to God have somehow obligated Him to us: You owe me.
      - a. I’ve done all these things: I go to church, I read my Bible, I say “no” all over the place, denying myself things so now God owes me
      - b. In our prayers: “God, if I do ‘x’ will you do ‘y’ for me?”
      - c. “I have repented, God, you owe me a clean slate!”
    2. Then people feel that life is unfair if things don’t go their way, because they feel that they have been better than others and those people have a better life
      - a. You look down on others who are not as “good” as you are
      - b. That is why we get anxious, fearful, angry, bitter, and irritable when things don’t go our way: *we think we deserve better treatment*
      - c. It doesn’t matter what your religion is, organized or secular, these feelings of “unfairness” and defensiveness reveal the true attitude of our hearts
    3. I feel like I should have done these things, but I failed to do them well enough, so I feel condemned and worthy of all suffering.
      - a. This self-pity has the same root as the more obvious arrogance: we feel that our blessing or our curse is based upon our ability to perform
      - b. When we believe this, we lose all joy because we are working within a system of religion that we have failed
  - ii. Religion makes us either look down on others or idolize others
    1. I judge others for lack of moral restraint
      - a. I look down on others in whom I see greater sin
      - b. Phariseeism
    2. I envy others for their righteousness
      - a. Self-pity
      - b. Joylessness
    3. Both are self-righteous religion that are based upon our performance/sacrifices
- d. The accusation: "You eat and drink while others fast and pray"
  - i. Fasting is a sign of humility – the humbling of the body as expression of the humbling of the heart
    1. It creates a focus on need, thus prayers to God to meet needs are usually associated with fasting as acts of dependence upon God
    2. Sometimes prayers of repentance or mourning/grief, sometimes longing for redemption
  - ii. comparison of disciples as evidence of the teachers
    1. All the committed religious people fasted and prayed *and were known for it*
      - a. Even John and the Pharisees agree on this (which they didn't on much)

- iii. John
  1. John's disciples probably fasted because they understood their need for grace evidenced by the emphasis on repentance
  2. Though John understood the need for salvation by grace alone, the utter destitution and inadequacy of his righteousness and the resultant humility before God, he didn't get the form that this salvation would take
  3. Thus, the humbling of fasting and the prayers for salvation were expressed the humility of the heart before God
- iv. Pharisees
  1. The Pharisees are one of four known groups in Jesus' time in Israel: Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and Zealots
    - a. Jesus had more in common with Pharisees than any of the others
      - i. Sadducees – no resurrection or supernatural
      - ii. Essenes – break away from society, ascetic
      - iii. Zealots – overthrow political power by force
      - iv. Pharisees – renewal of Israel, studied Scriptures, devout and dedicated, laymen not priesthood
    - b. About 6000 (1%) of Israel part of this party – by far the most influential of the four groups in their society
      - i. Jesus ate with a Pharisee
      - ii. Some Pharisees warned Jesus of Herod's desire to kill Him (Luke 13)
      - iii. Nicodemus was a Pharisee who came to Jesus and believed in His authority
    - c. Most of the Pharisees, however, did not believe in Jesus' authority or His claims to be the Son of God
  2. The Pharisees saw the renewal of Israel as coming not from the Torah, or the Law, but rather from the oral tradition of their elders, which were interpretations of the Law
    - a. They believed that the intent and the application of the Law had to be according to their traditions,
      - i. Jesus clashed with them because they misinterpreted and misapplied the Law and were unwilling to break from their traditions
      - ii. Traditionalism is bad while traditions may be good.
    - b. The Law calls for a fast twice a week, but the Pharisees fasted twice a week
    - c. Theatrical fasting to show how pious they were (2x a year? 2x a week!)
      - i. These guys are seriously pious!
      - ii. They wore grim clothes, put ashes on their heads, etc.
    - d. The fasts of the Pharisees were meant to be seen by God and others as evidence of their sincerity and piety, exactly the opposite of John's humility
  - v. The point was that the common understanding, even between John and the Pharisees, is that people who walk closely with God fast
    1. It would be like if you discovered that a great teacher whom you like, you buy his books or read his blog, didn't go to church
    2. "If you're serious about God, if you're really dedicated to His Kingdom, if you really love Him, etc. you go to church"
    3. This would have shocked people in the same way, only with "...if you fast"
- e. There is a connection of eating and drinking with sinners and tax collectors with prayer and fasting
  - i. It seems that gloom, severity, described the disciples of John & Pharisees, but that Jesus' disciples were characterized by rejoicing, eating, drinking, "partying" (in a sense)
  - ii. Your disciples enjoy themselves too much to be truly godly
  - iii. This accusation tells us something about Jesus and His disciples: they were having fun!
    1. Note the party at Levi's house
    2. Jesus didn't stay away from the world (as fasting/prayers of the Pharisees did – detaching them from the world so that the world would look at them)

3. Jesus and His disciples seemed to be joyful and gregarious and this was being categorized as ungodly, worldly, irreligious
4. Common belief: One cannot be pursuing holiness and have happiness at the same time!
- iv. How can Jesus not fast and instead be joining parties at sinners' houses and having a good time eating and drinking instead?
  1. Is He a sinner, a drunkard, a glutton? Doesn't He care about God (as they saw it)? Yet, He clearly heals paralytics and casts out demons, pronounces forgiveness and has authority over things which only God has authority over?
  2. Where does Jesus fit?

2. Christianity is being called *from* Religion to the Bridegroom

- a. The answer: "A Wedding is a Time for Rejoicing"
- b. The time has changed because the Bridegroom has come
  - i. The presence of the King marked the beginning of the time of redemption
  - ii. Zech 8:14-20 – predicting the day when the 4 fasts of mourning over God's judgment against our sin become days of feasting!
    1. This began with Jesus!
    2. This day called for feasting, not for fasting!
- c. I am the Bridegroom
  - i. significance in Jewish history and theology
  - ii. YHWH is the Bridegroom of Israel
    1. Hosea 2:19 – "I will betroth you to Me forever...in justice righteousness and peace, in covenant mercy."
    2. Isa 62:4-9
    3. see the mention of "delight" "rejoices" numerous times in Isa 62
    4. Jesus is stating that He is the fulfillment of the Messianic promises, as God delights in His people and joy is the order of the land
  - iii. The disciples of Jesus rejoice, eating and drinking and feasting, because their hope, their Divine King who was promised, is present with them!
    1. Jesus is making a categorically significant statement that He is the bridegroom because He is stating that He is the Messiah, the hope of Israel and of all the nations, God with His people
    2. Where Jesus is, there is a time for joy and feasting and celebration!
    3. Frankly, dour Christians make rude wedding guests!
- d. It is important to note that according to Jesus there are times for fasting, appropriate times of sorrow, longing, etc., but it is when *His presence* is longed for
  - i. Jesus clearly states that His disciples would fast in the future, when the Bridegroom was taken away
    1. When is this?
  - ii. Jesus also states in Matt 6 that "when you fast..." assuming that His disciples would be fasting
  - iii. However, fasting as a matter of course, or as the pattern which dominates the believer should not be
    1. Feasting should dominate, with occasional fasting
    2. Rather than fasting dominating, with occasional feasting
    3. The reason for this is because of the "down payment" of God's presence with us, the Holy Spirit, and yet the "not yet" of the fulfillment of Christ's redemption, the redemption of our bodies, for which we still long (Rom 8)
- e. The gospel of God's grace through God's Son changes everything!!
  - i. Jesus is saying that because of His coming and His redemptive work (as cast by His words of the Bridegroom leaving) constant morbidity over sins and solemnity is inappropriate.
  - ii. When you follow another teacher, you never know if God is OK with you, if your righteousness is enough, but when you are with Jesus, the Bridegroom, you are already at the wedding! The verdict is in: accepted!
  - iii. Look at Exodus 24 – "And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words." <sup>9</sup> Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, <sup>10</sup> and they saw the

God of Israel. There was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. <sup>11</sup> And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank. (Exo 24:8-11 ESV)

- f. "Follow Me..." - "I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners..."
  - i. If you are trusting in your own ability, wisdom, righteousness to be OK with God, then Jesus has nothing for you
  - ii. He calls sinners to repentance, from total self-dependence to total Christ-dependence in EVERY AREA OF LIFE
  
- 3. The parable: The New Presence of the Groom Won't Fit Onto the Old Religion Without Bursting It
  - a. Jesus is the new wine that bursts the wineskin
    - i. He doesn't fit the old natural idolatrous (works or law based) system
    - ii. He smashes it; Breaks out of it; Bursts its categories
      - 1. Trying to live religiously with Jesus will leave you feeling swollen, bloated, and distended
      - 2. It will not last. He will break forth
      - 3. We need a new wineskin, a new category: the category of complete grace
    - iii. Christianity is about having this foundation of religion shattered, smashed, and obliterated by the transforming power of Jesus in the heart
      - 1. There is a new wineskin, a new framework: the Gospel of Jesus Christ
      - 2. In the Gospel we see that we are all big sinners without hope and without God AND Jesus has come to rescue, redeem, and transform us through His death for our sins and His righteousness imputed to us so that we can stand before God blameless and holy by faith in Him
  - b. The only comparison that matters is the Great Exchange: His Righteousness for Your Sins by His Grace
    - i. Sin enslaves us through religion. Jesus sets us free by the transforming power of His Holy Spirit.
    - ii. Born from above, a new heart, a new spirit, a new freedom, complete and full of joy!
  - c. "The new wine (joy) has come and will burst the old patterns if you try to fit Him in them."
    - i. The mention of wine is also connected here with Isaiah 62 (as Luke often reveals Jesus as the promises Messiah through Isaiah's promises of the 5th gospel)
    - ii. "Good news of great joy which will be for all people" - 2:10
  - d. You cannot just add Jesus as another prophet or sage or teacher
    - i. He is not another magnet that you stick to your fridge
    - ii. He is not the patch for the various holes in your life, He's a whole new set of clothes
    - iii. When one comes to Jesus, Jesus makes everything new, blowing the doors off of our cozy little lives as he upends our self-righteousness and dethrones our egos and rules and reigns in righteousness
  - e. If you try and squeeze Jesus into your religious mold, your works-righteousness, He will shatter it, burst it, destroy it to shambles and you will be worse off than before
    - i. You need a new system, a new way at looking at EVERYTHING – through the lens of the gospel of Jesus
    - ii. You need a grace-wineskin, the gospel of the God who redeems sinners and gives them the verdict of "accepted" *before* they do anything good!
  - f. Because the Groom is here and is making all things new, it is a time to rejoice!!

If there's time:

Two Tests to Discover If We Are On the Right Track: Where is Your Joy?

- 1. How do you treat other people's moral failures?
  - a. Are you indignant, disgusted, maybe impatient and frustrated.
  - b. If so, you are religious...it's called being a Pharisee. You don't see that the root in them is the same root that is in you, and you'll have nothing to offer them in joy or hope, merely more religion which they have already failed.
    - i. "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance"

- ii. Luke 18:9-13
- 2. How do you treat your own moral failures?
  - a. Do you feel that you cannot face God; that you cannot look at yourself in the mirror? Do you beat yourself up over failure? Do you struggle with believing that God really loves you at all?
  - b. If so, what are you basing such judgments on? You are basing them on *your sacrifices, not His*. Remember, Jesus DIED! He died for you. It is done, it has been completed. It is finished. He has done it all! Your acceptance and loveliness to God is no longer based upon your ability to change yourself. You cannot do it! He presents you to God holy and blameless and He is transforming you in His image by His sovereign power! That's good news!
    - i. Is 43:25; Micah 7:18-19; Jeremiah 31:34; Ezek 36:24-28

My friends, Jesus came to smash this system of competitive and comparative religion of the heart. He doesn't fit this mold of religion, settle in this system of competition, nor can he be contained within its boundaries. Trying to put Jesus within the category of self-righteous religion will leave you feeling distended beyond comfort, swollen with joyless hypocrisy and competitive fear, and He will eventually break through your comfortable control of self-righteousness and shatter the foundations of your life. He is the great equalizer of all peoples, the One thing that every individual and class needs and must have. There is no righteousness by which one can compare to each other when Jesus is all in all.

If we want to see change in the world, it will only come in submissive faith in Jesus Christ. It will only come with the humility that sees the necessary renewal of all things: my wisdom, my understanding, my righteousness. When Jesus is the Lord over everything, every area, every morality, every righteousness, and the substitute for those very things that I could never provide or maintain, then I find the joy of redemption and the hope of glory. By His Holy Spirit's renewal the Christian is humbled with the humility that admits that the same root of sin in the terrorist is the same root of sin that is in me.

The bigger and deeper that we perceive our sin to be, the bigger the Savior that I need to redeem me, change me, renew me. The greater we see our own sin, the greater the gracious Jesus becomes in our lives. The greater the Savior is to our hearts, the greater the love for Him. The more we recognize the depths of His grace and the sufficiency of His sacrifice for our sins and His righteousness for our life, the more we rejoice in His provision! Let us learn to shed the religion of our hearts and the mere moral restraint of self-performance, and yearn for the grateful response of a Bride betrothed to a holy Groom.

You see, we have a heart-changing, life-giving, spirit-renewing, foundation-smashing, adventure-taking Redeemer. The Groom who delights in His Bride so that we do not need to fear the rejection of the world, the condemnation of our own hearts, or the accusations of the Enemy. Our Groom is betrothed to us and He delights in us. He gave Himself for us, what more will He hold back? By His own kindness, with His very own presence within us, He is making us to be like Him to a world that needs hope, joy, and freedom. Herein lies our hope, and the world's hope, of true rest and righteousness: Jesus, the Bridegroom who lays down His life for His Bride and has taken it up again for her joy.