



## The Joy of Fasting Mark 2:18-22

June 16, 2019  
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Every week I send out text messages about our Services and Events we have. When I shared this mornings message Title "The Joy of Fasting" I had a reply text saying, "The Joy is Fast Eating". Today, there is not much religious practice of fasting throughout our churches. Often, Southern Baptists have a stereotype of eating more than they are to fast. But I want to look at a passage of scripture that brought up a concern about fasting. May we have a better understanding of what fasting is and how can benefit us biblically.

*Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. And people came and said to him, "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?"* <sup>19</sup> And Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. <sup>20</sup> The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day. <sup>21</sup> No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the patch tears away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. <sup>22</sup> And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins—and the wine is destroyed, and so are the skins. But new wine is for fresh wineskins." **Mark 2:18-22**

Mark records that both John's disciples and the Pharisees were disturbed about the problem raised by Jesus' association with tax collectors and sinners and had raised a question about Jesus' disciples not fasting, meaning they were not practicing rituals of repentance. **We know that both these groups were Jewish and very religious or spiritual people.** Do you know people who are very religious or those who are spiritual people yet belief differently about Jesus' teachings in the Bible? Pharisees would fast twice a week to express their orthodox Judaism. Fasting was appropriate for John's Disciples as their message was centered on repentance. Jesus, whose own message included repentance, did not insist upon fasting. **These two groups have not yet transferred their allegiance to Jesus. They were observing Pharisaic traditions.** The Mosaic law required only one fast annually, on the Day of Atonement. This was an outward expression & sign of repentance or sorrow associated with prayer.

The Pharisaic traditions of fasting originated from the Old Testament Law and was practiced even by King David. One example was when David and Bathsheba's first son had become ill one night and was facing death. David pleaded with God and fasted in hope his child would live but his son passed.

*"So David arose from the ground, washed and anointed himself, and changed his clothes; and he went into the house of the LORD and worshipped. Then he went to his own house; and when he requested, they set food before him, and he ate. Then his servants said to him, "What is this that you have done? You fasted and wept for the child while he was alive, but when the child died, you arose and ate food." And he said, "While the child was alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, 'Who can tell whether the LORD will be gracious to me, that the child may live? But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me."*

**2 Samuel 12:20-23**

In David's era, Israelites belief in afterlife was that all would enter a place called Sheol whether they were wicked or righteous and would not leave. Later in the Gospels, Jesus spoke of Abraham's bosom and Hades which gives a clearer understanding of Heaven and Hell. Here is the confidence that there is a future reunion after death, which includes infants who have died being reunited with saints who die. Later in the Gospels, Jesus spoke of Abraham's bosom and Hades which gives a clearer understanding of Heaven and Hell. Here is the confidence that there is a future reunion after death, which includes infants who have died being reunited with saints who die.

In verse 19, Jesus' point was that the ritual practiced by John's disciples and the Pharisees was out of touch with reality. There was no reason for Jesus' followers to mourn and fast while enjoying the unique reality that He was with them. Mark highlights these illustrations of Jesus being the Bridegroom who has now come with a message of having a heart of repentance symbolized in the wineskin illustrated. But there will be an appropriate time to fast for His disciples at the crucifixion of Jesus. So, what is the spiritual point? Jesus offered two parables to illustrate that His new and internal gospel of repentance from sin and forgiveness of sin could not be connected to or contained in the old and external traditions of self-righteousness and ritual.

*"If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved."* **Romans 10:9-10**

**JESUS brings JOY and salvation to everyone who believes. FASTING does NOT bring joy and salvation.** Fasting becomes a tool to use and bring us to the source of all joy and true salvation. When Jesus dined with publicans and sinners, they were in the presence of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. When we are in the complete presence of God,

we are in no need of fasting. Much like when friends are with the bridegroom they are focus on the wedding. The images of new cloth and new wineskins show through the symbols of unwise action the inappropriateness of fasting in this new situation. **What is the Purpose of Fasting?** Without a purpose, fasting would be a miserable, self-centered experience. When we Fast appropriately, it brings Joy.

First, **Fasting is a Spiritual DISCIPLINE.** When God's Will is uncertain, or we have a great spiritual need, we pray and fast. Secondly, **Fasting always involves FOOD and is a FORM of Worship.** Fasting can't be faked and it doesn't come easy. **Fasting is a reminder of the SOURCE of all NOURISHMENT.**

*“When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”* **Matthew 6:16-17**

Thirdly, **Fasting is practiced for a Biblical PURPOSE** such as: **Strengthens PRAYER** (Ezra 8:23); **To Seek God's GUIDANCE** (Judges 20); **To Express GRIEF** (2 Samuel 1:11-12); **To Seek Deliverance or PROTECTION** (2 Chronicles 20:3-4); **To Express REPENTANCE** (Jonah 3:5-8); **To HUMBLE Oneself Before God** (1 Kings 21:27-29); **To Express Concern for the WORK of God** (Nehemiah 1:3-4; Daniel 9:3); **To Minister to the NEEDS of Others** (Isaiah 58:1-7); **To Overcome TEMPTATION and Dedicate Yourself to God** (Matthew 4:1-11); **To Express LOVE to God** (Phil. 3:19) When you fast, don't fast inappropriately just for show, don't cheat in your fast by fasting from other things instead of food, but fast for a biblical purpose.