

The Bridegroom

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[0 : 0 0] church, and it's my joy to bring God's Word to you today. A special welcome if you're new or visiting with us. We're glad that you're here, and we're glad that you're here not just because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community.

And as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced that there's no one so good they don't need God's grace, and no one so bad they can't have it, which is why we come back week after week to hear what God has to say to us in His Word. We're continuing our series in the Gospel of Mark. You'll remember that the Gospels tell the story of Jesus and His life and His death and His resurrection. And as we're going through, we're asking two questions together. We're asking the question of who is Jesus and how do we respond to Him? Last week, we saw Jesus calling Levi, the tax collector. And when we got into that, we understood why the Gospel is so offensive. God doesn't save people that we would save, and God does save people that we wouldn't save. His dividing line is not between the good and the bad. His dividing line is between those who know their need and those who don't, because as He tells us, He has come not for the well, but for the sick. He came not to call the righteous, but sinners. This week, we're continuing in a series of stories of Jesus' conflict with the religious leaders, and we're jumping in in verse 18 in this question about fasting, and we're going to be looking at the newness and the joy and the celebration of the Gospel, what it is that Jesus brings that we didn't have before. And so we're going to jump right in. I invite you to turn with me to Mark chapters 2, starting at verse 18. You can turn in your worship guide.

You can turn on your phone. You can turn in your Bibles. No matter where you turn, remember that this is God's Word. God tells us that His Word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold, and it's sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb. And so that's why we read now, starting at verse 18. 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?

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. Verse 20. The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day. No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment.

[2 : 3 6] If he does, the patch tears away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. 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.

I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's Word. Our Father in Heaven, we thank you again that you have not left us alone to figure out this world on our own, but instead you have given us your Word to guide us and direct us. We ask that you would do that this morning, that you would help us to see your beauty, and your glory, and your purity, and your holiness, that you'd help us to see our need for you, and you'd comfort us as you show us how you meet us at that very same point of need. We ask that you would show us the newness and the joy and the life that you bring in Jesus Christ, that it would give us new hope, new energy, new zeal as we go forward in this week. We ask all these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Amen. I've mentioned a few times that growing up, my mother constantly would read aloud to us, and as young children, one of the series that we dug into was the Boxcar Children, which if you're familiar with it in the very first book, they discover this boxcar that they're able to have all sorts of adventures in, and in book two, in Surprise Island, the children's grandfather owns a private island that he invites them to for the summer, and they find all these different artifacts, and they have this wonderful idea that they're going to put together a museum that they can display, you know, the

seashells, and the flowers, and things that they can find. Now, my brothers and I, we did not have a grandfather with a private island, unfortunately, but we did decide it was a great idea to put together a museum just like they did in the book, and so family members began giving us a variety of objects. We put this museum in the crawl space in my parents' house where we grew up, and it's only now, as someone who's older, I can appreciate the terror of being someone visiting our house and having these young kids invite you to come down into this little crawl space so you could see their museum. Of course, we were much more flexible as young children, right? But one of the objects that we received was from my grandmother, who gave us her book of ration stamps from World War II. My grandmother was born in 1931, and then, you know, Pearl Harbor happened in 1941, so she was 10 years old when the war broke out, and everyone in the family would have had their own ration book for a variety of things, for gas, for groceries, perhaps for a variety of household items. In fact, the story's told of a couple who wanted to go on their honeymoon, and so they decided to walk everywhere so they could save up their gas ration stamps for that time when they actually wanted to travel. So, of course, something that's challenging for us even to wrap our heads around today, but the same thing was true in World War I. They would have meatless Tuesdays, wheatless Wednesdays, and they had this phrase where they'd go around saying, food will win the war.

So, I want you to hold that image in your head. I also want you to remember another image, not from 1941, but from 1945. In August, we had VJ Day, Victory Over Japan Day, and there's that famous image of that sailor who's kissing a woman in Times Square. And so, you have both of those images I want you to hold side by side, which give us two different ways that war works. One, there's a general principle here. It's during war time that you fast and that you ration. It's when victory comes that you celebrate.

[6:17] You don't celebrate during war. You don't fast during victory. Okay, so there's an appropriate time for different actions. What's appropriate in one setting could, in fact, be shocking, scandalous, offensive, rude in another setting. And that's the principle that Jesus is applying here in this passage. In Jesus' ministry, at this time, it is inappropriate to fast. That's the story that we jump into here. John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. Some people think they were fasting at the very same moment that Jesus was feasting with Levi. And so, this might be the reason that this question is coming up, that Jesus is enjoying himself at the same time that they're restricting themselves.

And Jesus points out here that there's something tone-deaf, something socially inept about what they're doing. That fasting is not bad. It's just bad at the wrong time. And during Jesus' ministry, it's wildly inappropriate. And so, we see here in verse 18 the question, Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?

And Jesus gives them this answer. Well, it's the wrong time. It's not fasting time. Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. Fasting is for mourning. Feasting is for joy. In other words, we're not in wartime right now. We're in victory time. Okay? The war is coming to an end. The disciples of John and the Pharisees are tone-deaf. They can't read the room. They can't understand and see what it is that's happening before their eyes. Of course, we know that very same thing. We're in November now. You're in the first Sunday of November. That's why we have our communion table set up. Thanksgiving is right around the corner. Okay? Thanksgiving is not the time or the place for counting calories.

Diets are not something for November and December. When are diets for? Diets are for January. While the holidays are here, we cannot fast. When the holidays are over, then the guests of the bridegroom can fast, right? There are seasons and timings for when it's appropriate to grieve, when it's appropriate to celebrate. You ration during war, not victory. You fast when you mourn, not when you celebrate. The party is not about you. If you can't celebrate with everyone else, then don't go. Jesus is so strong here, he uses the language of cannot. As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. It's not even that it's a bad idea. It's that it is impossible.

It's something that you should never even think about doing. Of course, we know also about things that we cannot do. If you go up to a woman, you cannot ask her about her pregnancy unless she has made it clear to you that she's pregnant. Okay? It's not just a bad idea. It is something you cannot do.

[9 : 24] If you're invited to a black tie event, you cannot wear sweatpants. It's not just that it's a bad idea. It is something you cannot do. There's nothing wrong with sweatpants, by the way. Okay? Great piece of clothing.

Just the wrong time. When do you wear sweatpants? When you're at home after the party is over. Okay? There's an appropriate time and setting and place. When do you fast, verse 20, after the bridegroom is gone?

Jesus is the one here who is coming and bringing the party. Of course, fasting here in some ways is the background point. If we get obsessed with fasting, we have missed the thrust of this passage. What is standing in the foreground, what Jesus is trying to tell us is that he is in fact the bridegroom. The bridegroom is present. We saw in our Old Testament reading from this morning from Isaiah chapter 62 that this image of the bridegroom is used to represent God and his relationship with his people. And it appears not just in Isaiah chapter 62, it appears throughout the Old Testament as this concept and idea to explain God's attitude and disposition, his relationship with his people, that he loves them, he's committed to them, he is coming to be with them, and he rejoices over them. So if you turn back with me to page four on your worship guide, you'll see at the very end of our Old Testament reading, verse five, for as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your sons marry you. And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you. That shall is a future word.

God is coming, that's what's promised in the Old Testament. He's coming to be present with his people like a bridegroom with his bride, and he's going to come and rejoice over them and be with them.

And so the fasting here is a background point made to highlight a foreground reality, which is that Jesus has finally come as the bridegroom to fulfill God's promises from the Old Testament that he would be with his people. It's the words that he'd given them over and over of the covenant that I will be your God, you will be my people, I will dwell with you forever. And so anyone here who knows their Old Testament in this setting in Mark chapter two would understand what Jesus is telling them implicitly, I am not just a good teacher. I am the bridegroom who has been promised for thousands of years.

[11 : 57] I am not just a man. I am God who has come to be with his people. Something new and great and glorious is happening. You'll remember the summary of Jesus' teaching from Mark chapter one in verses 14 and 15. He comes preaching repentance, and he comes preaching that the kingdom of God is here. He has come to bring in a new and entirely different reality. Something has changed about the world. There is something fundamentally different about the age that we live in now because we live in the time after Jesus' coming. In his book, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, C.S. Lewis tells the story of four children who are sent to a professor's house during World War II to escape the bombing. And if you're familiar with the story, you know that they find a wardrobe that serves as an entry point into an entirely different world. And while they're there, they're fleeing from the antagonist, this evil white witch. And the children, as they're going about, they meet a variety of characters. They meet Tumnus the fawn, and they meet the beaver family. And Tumnus is the one who first tells Lucy the harsh reality of living under the spell of the white witch. He tells her the way to understand it is that it is always winter and never Christmas. Okay, it's always winter, never Christmas.

So Lucy then begins to tell her siblings about that. And they go, they hang out with the beavers, if you're familiar with the story, and they have to flee with the beavers from the agents of the white witch who are coming after them. However, as they flee, when we're in chapter 10, the spell begins to break. They realize something is different about the world because they hear a person nearby as they're hiding in this beaver hideout. They think it's someone who's come to hurt them, but in fact, it's quite the opposite. It turns out it is Father Christmas. And so Mr. Beaver says this, didn't I tell you that she'd made it always winter and never Christmas? Didn't I tell you, well, just come and see. And then they were all at the top, and they did see. Of course, they see this sled with reindeer and a man who looks like Father Christmas. And he tells us, but now that the children actually stood looking at him, they didn't find it quite like that. He was so big and so glad and so real that they all became quite still. They felt very glad, but also solemn. I've come at last, said he.

She has kept me out for a long time, but I have got in at last. Aslan is on the move. The witch's magic is weakening. And Lucy felt running through her that deep shiver of gladness, which you only get if you are being solemn and still. Jesus is telling these people that in the time of the Old

Testament, as they were looking forward to his coming, their experience of reality spiritually was that it was always winter and never Christmas. And now that he has come, the spell of evil in the world is broken in a new way. There is something decisive that has changed in the world. It is better and greater and more powerful. The powers of darkness have weakened and lessened. They are dimming now that Jesus the bridegroom is here. As his people have looked and longed for God's presence with his people, it has finally arrived. The moment that they have been told about for hundreds of years has come. Aslan is on the move.

And so they, and we like Lucy can feel running through us that deep shiver of gladness, which you only get if you are being solemn and still. The King has finally arrived. The possibility of Christmas is here.

There is something new and different and decisive. And if Jesus here is quoting from the images of the Old Testament, then of course he's saying that he is also God. He is what we're about to celebrate as we begin Advent in a couple of weeks. Emmanuel, God with us. Father Christmas came because Aslan was breaking the power of evil in the world.

[16:22] Jesus has come with victory in the war over and against sin in this world. This is victory over Japan day. This is the sign that something is new and definitive. This is not the time for ration stamps.

It is the time for celebrating in Times Square. The enemy has finally come to the end of his power. Chapter 1 verses 14 and 15, the kingdom has arrived.

And so we celebrate as well, knowing that the bridegroom has come. We know God's love in a greater way than people in the Old Testament. We understand God's plan more clearly than they did. We know God's presence even more. We know what it's like for the bridegroom to have arrived. There is something new and distinct and permanent just like there is with any wedding. Jesus has come. The spell is beginning to break. Christmas is on the way. The long wait has ended.

Now the title here is a question about fasting, but we expand beyond fasting. We start with fasting. [17:47] We just don't end there. We expand here to something larger, more holistic, this greater point that Jesus wants to make. Fasting is just one manifestation, one illustration of what Jesus is trying to teach them here about the newness of his arrival in the kingdom. He is teaching them about something bigger and broader. Jesus is making a larger point that there is something new and different in the world.

And so when we talk about fasting, we're talking about celebration versus grieving, joy versus mourning. Jesus expands this though to tell us it's not just that, it's also the new versus the old. It's also the new versus the old. And so he gives us two very simple images about new things and old things not going together. First in verse 21, we have the example of clothing. We all know that when you wash clothing, especially if you put it in the dryer, it's going to shrink on you. So if you have an old piece of clothing that has already shrunk, you put a new patch on it that hasn't shrunk, it's going to contract, right? And it's going to pull the old clothing in with it. So it's going to ruin it. In other words, the new can't mix in with the old. It will destroy it.

And then he gives us an image that we're probably less familiar with, some of us, verse 22, this idea of fermentation. When you ferment things, including wine, they're going to expand.

[19:11] This is, by the way, why people who ferment often will use mason jars, because you need glass that's strong enough to handle the internal pressure. That's why if you're brewing certain things, you'll have a pressure release on the top to make sure the air that needs to get out can get out.

Things that are new and fermenting expand. And so, of course, if you put it inside something that's already been expanded, an old wineskin, it has no stretch left to it. And so it's going to be ruined. This clothing here, this wineskin, is telling us about the old system of Judaism. Jesus is bringing something new. The system of religion does not know. He is bringing something new that it cannot coexist with. And so this might sound really theoretical and abstract. You might think, what does it even mean that Jesus is bringing something that breaks apart Judaism? Thankfully, we've already seen many examples. New wine and old wineskins looks like lepers being touched.

Remember, under the old ceremonial system, they were supposed to be outside of the city. And yet Jesus comes and he violates that. The new coming and tearing apart the old means that tax collectors are welcomed into God's kingdom. Those who were such that even if you ate with them, you would become unclean are now part of God's new community, the one that Jesus is calling to

himself.

The paralytics are healed. Demons are cast out. Jesus is coming and doing something new. The old system in the Old Testament was meant to emphasize God's purity and his holiness, that we are outside of him and cannot come into him without a sacrifice. And so they had all these rules about cleanliness and mold and lepers.

[20 : 56] They had all these sacrifices and systems in the temple. Jesus comes with a new and better system that cannot coexist with those things because he comes and brings the cleanliness and the purity they were meant to point to.

There is no need to cast lepers outside the camp anymore because what that represented, our distance from God because of our sin has been healed and restored in Jesus Christ.

And so the old system cannot hold anymore. The old distinctions lose their weight and their importance. The ceremonial law is done away with. There is no need for sacrifices anymore.

Lepers who were socially isolated and separated, part of the Old Testament prescription, are now brought in near and close to God because he is able to be with and near and within sinners and sinful people because Jesus is the one who has come and taken on their lack of cleanliness, their dirtiness for them.

There is a new system that cannot coexist with the old anymore. The Old Testament was meant to teach people about the seriousness of sin, the need for God to cleanse them.

[22 : 09] Now the bridegroom has come to accomplish and do that cleansing. The Old Testament taught us about the holiness and purity of God. Jesus has come to teach us about the love and sacrifice of God.

It is no longer separation but inclusion. You cannot mix new wine with old wineskins.

Later on in Jesus' ministry, the temple curtain is going to be torn in half from top to bottom because the Holy of Holies is no longer needed.

The old system's time has passed. And so Jesus challenges the very foundations of Judaism. He is tearing apart the current system that cannot hold together anymore.

For us as people who live 2,000 years later after Jesus made this pronouncement, we still have joy and freedom that is there for us in Christ.

[23 : 12] We still celebrate the bridegroom. We know God's presence in a way that people in the Old Testament did not. We are able to see and know and understand, experience joy in God's work for us that they were not able to have.

We have clarity about God's plan and purpose of redemption in this world that they did not have.

We live in the era where Christmas is here. We can no longer say always winter but never Christmas.

That was the watchword of the time before Christ. Now after Christ, the new is so powerful and fresh it cannot coexist along with the old. The new is so powerful and fresh that we are able to see Jesus' work for us, understand how he is reaching all around the world, bringing people not just from in Judaism but from without Judaism.

He is touching things no one else would touch. He is including those who no one else would include. He is saving people we would not save, touching people we would not touch. We live now at the beginning of a new and better age.

And so just like the Pevensy children in Narnia, seeing Father Christmas as the first sign that the power of evil is breaking, we live having seen that sign as well.

[24 : 34] We know whatever snow there is of darkness in this world, it is melting now and it will fully and finally melt one day. There is nothing and no one that can stop the advance of God's kingdom in this world and we have more confidence of this than anyone else.

It has been always winter and never Christmas in the past and that is not now and it will never be again. Jesus replaces the old with the new.

The world is decisively, definitively better now for us after Jesus coming to this world. That is part of what we praise him for when we come to worship, that we get to live in this age.

We get to live knowing the new wine and the new cloth. We get to live knowing the presence of the bridegroom.

Jesus has come with victory over the war over sin. Now Jesus tells us they're going to feast now, but verse 20, he warns them of a day of fasting.

[25 : 55] The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them and then they will fast on that day. Now days here, plural, many people think this is talking about the future church age when Jesus is no longer physically present with us.

What we can say is Jesus' most immediate going away is going to be his death. In other words, they have him with them now.

There will come a time when they will grieve for him. There will come a time when Jesus dies on the cross and he is in the tomb. There will come a time when they wait and wonder to see what is going to happen.

There will be a time when the bridegroom is taken away and they can mourn. There might be a wedding now. There will be a funeral later.

And we know how that funeral ends. We know that the bridegroom is raised again from the dead on the third day.

[27 : 06] We know that the power of evil does not hold him down. We know even more than those Jesus is teaching in this passage how fully and definitively he has conquered sin and death forever.

And so we, even more than them, are able to celebrate and see the bridegroom in his joy and glory and his presence with us. That he, as we're told in Isaiah 62, verse 5, he rejoices over us.

He rejoices over you, his church, here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian. And so Jesus dies. He gives up his life for the feast. He's able to enable the time of celebration because the time of mourning doesn't last forever.

It ends with him rising again from the dead. It ends with that power that shows us that death in this world will have its full and final funeral.

One day, death will sing its last song. And so Jesus will die for this very feast that he brings, the feast with the bridegroom.

[28 : 18] About 15 or 20 years ago, there was an episode, late night TV, that featured Ron Patrick.

Ron was a Stanford University mechanical engineer. And Ron decided he wanted to take on a project that no one else had taken on before, and that was to put a jet engine inside a car.

And so Ron chose the perfect car for that. It's exactly what you'd want to put a jet engine into. He chose a Volkswagen Beetle. And so he took this huge, sturdy Beetle, you know, with this truck chassis, as all Beetles have, and he attached this jet engine onto the back.

So you can find pictures of this online. It's sticking out. So you have a Volkswagen Beetle and then just a jet engine sticking out of the back. There's only one problem with the car, and that's starting it. The jet engine goes over 1,200 degrees Fahrenheit. Which is hot enough to destroy the car itself, right? And so Ron Patrick has never tried to see how fast this car can go.

[29 : 27] He says when he takes it on the highway, he just sets it to 140 and keeps it there. And he can't start it more than three times per hour because the heat is so great that if he did it more than that, it would destroy the car itself.

At risk of stating the obvious, jet engines are meant for planes. They are not meant for cars. What Jesus is telling us in this passage is that he has brought a 1,350 horsepower engine.

That's the power of the jet engine. He's brought it into a 90 horsepower world. That's the power of the Volkswagen Beetle. Of course the world cannot handle and sustain the power of his energy and victory.

Of course we need something new. We need not a car for a jet engine. We need a full jet able to fly and take us to places that people would have dreamed only of in the past, right?

Jesus brings something more great and more powerful than we could even imagine. He brings his jet engine into a Volkswagen world. He comes with something exponentially more powerful than we've seen or known or experienced.

[30 : 40] And so what do we do with that? We celebrate him. We rejoice in him because he is the bridegroom who has finally come to be with us.

He has brought something greater and more powerful, something more glorious and wonderful than we could ever imagine. He's the bridegroom who's come.

To be with his people. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we thank you that you exceed our greatest and wildest imaginations.

That the gospel is more powerful than we could realize or hope, powerful enough to end death itself. We ask that you would work that truth deep into our hearts, that we would be able to praise you and rejoice in you more and more as we live life in this world knowing that no matter what our

circumstances are, they do not have the final word, but you do.
We ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen.