

Title: How much do you really want to know?
Text: Matthew 9.14-17
Theme: Following Jesus is revolutionary.
Series: Matthew #53
Prop Stmtnt: The Kingdom of Christ is nothing that you would have ever imagined.

Read Text:

I was over at my neighbor's one evening helping him with a little project when his daughter said, "Hey, I have a question for you. What is the difference between Catholic and Baptist?" I was standing on a ladder and she had her coat on and was headed out the door. It was not like we were sitting at the kitchen table with a huge bowl of popcorn and a couple of hours. So, I said, "How much do you really want to know?" I have found that most people do not think very deeply about God. So, when they think in terms of church and religion they assume that it is about rules and traditions, rather than thinking in terms of actual belief and issues of the heart. So, when they ask questions like, "What's the difference between Catholic and Baptist" or something along that line, most of the time they are assuming that the answer to that has something to do with what you can or cannot do, or worship styles or other traditions.

In this text Matthew tells us about the time when some of the disciples of John the Baptist were in the crowd along with some of the Pharisees, and were obviously talking about the fact that the Pharisees fasted on a regular basis and the disciples of John the Baptist fasted on a regular basis but the disciples of Jesus didn't fast. By the way, the Pharisees not only fasted (that is went without food) on the Day of Atonement and on the day of the New Year, but they also went without food every Monday and Thursday. You see the problem don't you? In order to be a Pharisee you fasted twice a week (Luke 18.12). Fasting twice a week was a tradition of the elders. In order to be a disciple of John the Baptist (Baptizer) you fasted, presumably twice a week. You did this because you were told that this was something that would please God, or that you needed to do. Here comes Jesus, and his followers do not fast! What is up with that? How can you do that? Is that even ok? How do they get away with that? Why do we have to fast and they don't? In fact, Matthew, Mark and Luke all record this account after the dinner that Jesus and his disciples had at Matthew's home. My guess is that they had this huge dinner on a Monday or a Thursday and Jesus' disciples were talking about how succulent the food in front of the disciples of John. So, naturally they want to know why do we have to fast and you don't. The answer that Jesus gives initially seems a bit odd, doesn't it?

I. **What is the deal with fasting and what on earth was Jesus talking about?** (14-15)

The response of Jesus is sort of like a, "how much do you really want to know" response. Instead of giving them a surface answer, he takes them a little deeper and says things that go after the heart of the matter, or that goes after their hearts. In many cases, Jesus will

give an answer that has a delayed impact. This is one of those. No one fully understood what he was talking about at the moment, but in the years to come, they would look back and go, "Oh yea! That's what he was talking about!" In order to understand his response, we need to remember that...

A. Fasting is directly related to grief. (14)

The Pharisees fasted because their nation was in bondage to Rome. Not only that, but there were many Jews who were not living "kosher" lives. That is, they were not living in obedience to the Old Testament law. Life in Israel was not what it was supposed to be. The glory of Israel was gone. So, the Pharisees were fasting. Now, we know that over time for some of the Pharisees, the fasting had less and less to do with the spiritual poverty of the country and mourning over that and had more and more to do with advancing the spiritual reputation of the Pharisee himself (Luke 18.12). In other words, let me impress you with my spiritual discipline.

Now, for the disciples of John the Baptist, the fasting was probably more of an urgent response to the spiritual crisis of the day. John was deeply concerned about the condition of the country. The king was an imposter whose decadent and immoral life was an embarrassment and an indictment on the land. The High Priest position had become totally politicized and even the Pharisees who were supposed to be a reform movement for holiness had become taken over by self-righteousness and hypocrisy.

The funny thing is that the disciples of John pose the question as if they have more in common with the Pharisees than they do with the disciples of Jesus. This is even more interesting when you remember that some of the disciples of Jesus had been disciples of John. So, in other words they are saying, "Hey how come you don't have to fast anymore? That doesn't seem fair!" In essence Jesus says,

B. You cannot grieve (fast) when it's time to party. (15a)

In other words, "I am here!" This is really an astounding statement that Christ makes. He makes it a bit cryptically but in essence he is saying, "I am here, so we can get the party started now." Jesus is identifying himself as the bridegroom. In those days, the wedding started when the bridegroom showed up.

Today, a couple gets engaged and they have to pick a wedding date. The date is determined by the procurement of the site for the wedding and the reception. Then you send out "save-the-date" notices. Then you send out invitations. And the rest of the time you lose your mind stressing over details. That was NOT how things happened in the days of Christ. The marriage was typically arranged, often with the consent of the bride and groom. Then the groom left to get ready for the marriage. He would go to prepare a place for her and his leaving was marked with a promise to return to come and get her that where he is, there she may be also. He left to get everything in order. He had to make certain that he had income, that he had a home and that he was in a position to be able to

care for, provide for and protect her. He also had to provide a dowry for the family of the bride. Meanwhile, the bride had to get ready for the wedding and get ready to leave. She did not know when he would return. She knew he would return. Everyone waited on the bridegroom to show up and did not show up until he had everything in order. Therefore, when he showed up, the celebration would begin! And when he arrived the wedding was not a 30 minute ceremony followed by a meal. Weddings and their celebrations lasted for 7 days. There was a lot of food and wine served. Why do we go on diets after Christmas? Well, that's obvious. Christmas is a lousy time to be on a diet. Well, you certainly do not want to fast when the bridegroom shows up because that means that the celebration and the festivities, and the food and the reunion and the joy is here for everyone.

As you may know, our son and daughter-in-law are expecting Robert Burton Johnson, IV to arrive in less than 2 months, which means that every sermon from now til I die will probably have an illustration in it about my grandson(s) and granddaughter(s). I'm just letting you know. Anyway, I found this great little shirt the other day in a Nike store that says, "I have arrived." A shirt like this is cute on a baby. A shirt like this on an adult is obnoxious, unless you are the One that the world has been waiting for and desperately needs. Jesus is saying that it is not time to fast because He has arrived. Do you see this now? The Pharisees were fasting and the disciples of John were grieving and Jesus was saying, you are grieving only because you do not know who I am! I have arrived. The bridegroom is here. You need to celebrate this now because ...

C. **The time for fasting will come.** (15b)

Notice that phrase "is taken away from them." I believe that this is the first time in Matthew's gospel that Jesus speaks about his death. This phrase refers to a violent and unwelcome action, like a kidnapping or an arrest. Jesus says, when that happens then it will be time for fasting. Jesus doesn't say any more about his death. In fact, no one at that time really understood what he was saying. Fact is, even when he said it directly, the disciples still did not accept it. But now, Jesus moves on and talks about the fact that no one repairs a hole in a piece of clothing with a piece of fabric that has not been washed and that no one puts new wine into old wineskins. So...

II. **What is the deal with cloth and wine and what on earth was Jesus talking about?** (16-17)

This sounds like it just landed from left field, doesn't it? Now, we know that there was nothing random about Jesus. Everything that he did and everything that he said was explicitly intentional. Sometimes he said things that forced his listeners (and now readers) to think. Jesus wants us to think. He wants us to be engaged so that we have a greater understanding of his plan. So, while it may initially sound a bit odd, there is a point that he wants you to discover. So...

A. **What is the point?**

The Pharisees and John's disciples were reflecting the old way of thinking, which was: "What do I have to do in order to make myself good enough before God?" Part of their answer to that was –what? Fasting! So, along comes Jesus and his disciples and they do not fast, right? And of course these guys want to know how can you be good enough before God and not fast? If someone says that in order to be good enough before God you have to fast 3 times a week and someone else says you only have to fast one time a week and someone else says, that you don't have to fast at all, who are you inclined to believe? The questions have not changed much in the past 2000 years have they? The sad thing is that they all reveal this fundamental belief that religion is a structure that gives me hope for eternity and rules that are good for me. This past week, I asked our youth intern, Caleb Evans to take some of his students and ask people there thoughts to this question: What is the purpose of religion? Here were some of their responses.

The Pharisees and the disciples of John were, in their own ways, looking for a renewal of the kingdom of Israel and a reformation of her spiritual life. Jesus did not come to bring a renewal or a reformation but a revolution. Jesus is already putting them on notice. You cannot confine Jesus in a synagogue. He is blowing up the synagogue and replacing it with the church. You cannot limit Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem. That Temple will be destroyed, but his Temple will take over the earth. You cannot limit Jesus to the Jews because his people are going to come from every tribe, language and nation. At the same time, Jesus came in fulfillment of the Old Testament promises. The Old Testament laws and rituals were there for a purpose. They were in place to prepare the world for the coming of Jesus. They served Jesus. Jesus did not serve them.

Let's look at the two examples that he gives. If you have a hole in your pants (robe) and you find a matching piece of material that you are going to sew on to the fabric, then you had better pre-wash the patch. Cloth shrinks from washing and if you put the new on, without preparing it, then you are going to have a worse problem. What is the point? You cannot take something entirely new and use it on something that is old. It will not work.

It is like wine and wineskins. Wineskins were made out of animal skins and were used to store wine particularly if you were going to be traveling. Over time, if you had an old wineskin, it would be dry and prone to cracking. If you put new wine in the old wineskin then as the new wine was still fermenting, the pressure would be too great on the old wineskin. The old wineskin would crack and leak because of the pressure and you would not only ruin the wineskin, but you would lose all of the wine. Again, the point is, if you try to put something new into something old, it will not work. Everything will be ruined. So, what is the new wine and what is the old wineskin? The new wine is the gospel. The old wineskin is life under the Old Testament law. You cannot advance the gospel of Christ through the laws and structure of the Old Testament. The laws of the Old Testament point to the gospel, but the laws of the Old Testament are not the gospel. The structure of the Old Testament system pointed to Christ, but the structure cannot contain nor advance the gospel. The Old Testament was full of symbols that pointed to the real thing. The real thing was Christ. After Christ came, the need for the symbols was gone. Later on, the Pharisees will become enraged because Jesus does not keep the Sabbath like they think he should. But Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath. He is the Sabbath! He is our

rest because He has done all of the work for our salvation. We rest in Him. The Sabbath rest in the Old Testament pointed to this NT reality. We do not need to rest on Saturday anymore (that is the Sabbath) because we have Christ!

Christ did not come to keep the rules of the Pharisees, nor add to the laws of the Old Testament. He came to change us from the inside and to give us a heart that loves him and seeks to honor him. Genuine Christianity is fundamentally a relationship of the mind (believing and trusting), the will (obeying) and the heart (loving), and not of a system of control and shame. When you use the atmosphere of rules and shame to advance the gospel of grace, you will blow it all up.

I had recently had lunch with a guy who was in a very rules-driven church. Oh they would tell you that you needed to believe on Jesus to be saved and that you could not earn your forgiveness, but nothing in the church seemed to line up with what they claimed to believe. There were rules about what people were supposed to wear, what kind of music people could listen to, what hair styles were acceptable, etc. If you did not keep to the code, you were punished. Actually, you were shamed. In spite of the fact that the leaders of the church all kept to the code (externally), their lives were full of blatant sin. She could not reconcile how you could have all of these rules that you kept in front of others, but behind the scenes you were so angry, manipulative, even immoral. So, guess what she did, he asked me. She converted to Islam. She found in Islam more rules and she concluded that the problem before was that people did not have enough rules. They simply needed more rules and she thought she found it in Islam. But, what she was looking for was not found in the rules of Islam either. Eventually, she found it in Christ. Why? Because he kept the rules that we couldn't. He lived the life that we couldn't. He fulfilled our righteousness.

This is the point of his words. He just told them that he was going to be taken away, which is referring to his dying. But, his dying was going to be inauguration of a completely new way of living. Let me ask you two questions and we will be done.

Conclusion:

Are you known for your joy?

Jesus said that because he had come, it was not time for grief, it was time for joy! Now, we are living in between the two comings of Christ. So, we experience grief, but our grief is not forever, our joy is. Grief will not win, joy will. Christ has come and is coming again. So, I ask you: Are you known for your joy? Some of you are known for being people who are impossible to please. You act as if it is your spiritual gift to criticize and disagree with an attitude. Where does that come from? It doesn't come from Jesus. It is not the fruit of the gospel. It does not soften your heart and help you be tender to the Holy Spirit. It does not help your kids either.

If I understand Christ correctly in his answer to the disciples of John, there will be no fasting in heaven. There will not be mourning or scowling in heaven. There will not be

arms crossed, or eyebrows furrowed in heaven. For some of you, your arms don't know what to do if they aren't crossed. Listen, I say this in love, but if you think your face would break if you would smile in church, what do you think you are going to do in heaven? If you have no joy here, what makes you think that you actually belong to the One who is Infinite Joy?

Are you in bondage to traditions?

Traditions can be useful unless you use them as standards for right and wrong. If something is not clearly mandated in the Bible for the church, then we dare not add it in and pretend that we are doing God a favor because we discovered something that He forgot to include. I have been here long enough that we now have traditions that I started. Not long ago I was accused of changing something that "we have always done." I said, "What are you talking about? I'm the one who started it! And if I started it, I can certainly unstart it." It's scary to see how quickly something that is not mandated in the Bible can become something that "we have to do." And over time, this is what church will become; traditions, rituals and structure. Jesus gave us a better way.

My neighbor's daughter was not really interested that night in a long explanation of the differences between Catholics and Baptists. I hoped that one day we could continue that conversation, and by God's grace, one evening we did. She and her fiancé came over to our home and I had the opportunity to fully explain the gospel to her. It is so freeing to not have to say to a question, "I don't know, we've just always done it that way." Life with Christ is not adequately defined by "I don't know we've just always done it that way."