Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Matchless Distinctiveness of the Gospel
Scripture: Mark 2:18–22
Code: 41-10

Let's open the Word of God to Mark chapter 2 in our continuing look at the life of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and an examination of the text of the gospel writers concerning Him, the great history of Mark, what a delight it is to go through this book after all the years we've spent in Luke and revisit the life of our Lord from another perspective. As we come to chapter 2, we look at verses 18 to 22 in our lesson this morning, verses/ 18 to 22. Just a little bit of a preliminary to the text itself. I've entitled this, this message, I've given it the title of "The Matchless Distinctiveness of the Gospel...The Matchless Distinctiveness of the Gospel." And that is really what this text teaches us. We need to be reminded that the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ which is the heart and soul of Christianity is absolutely unique. It is distinctive, it is exclusive. It is one of a kind in the purest sense of that. That is to say, the gospel of Jesus Christ is unmixable. It is incompatible with any and all other religious ideas and religious beliefs. It cannot co-exist with any other means of salvation, with any other religious idea or religious belief. The gospel cannot blend into any religious system in any way, and anybody who thinks it can is absolutely wrong, and that is exactly what our Lord Jesus says in the text before us, whether you're talking about systems of works salvation that call themselves Christian, such as Roman Catholicism, or orthodox church theology, or Mormonism, or Jehovah's Witnesses, or any other kind of Christian cult or form of Christianity, or liberal Christianity or anything in any other religious form whether it is Islam, or any other religion. There is no mingling, there is no mixing with the gospel. That is true particularly of Judaism. Judaism is incompatible with the biblical gospel, that is the Judaism that exists today and the Judaism that existed in the time of our Lord.

The gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is absolutely unique, matchless and exclusive. And this needs to be stated very strongly in our day because we live in a time which exalts diversity of belief, which exalts individuality, which is content for everybody to have his own religious beliefs as if they all had equal merit. Our day elevates tolerance of all kinds of religious notions. We are a pluralistsic, inclusive kind of universalistic thinking culture. Christianity, of course, is contrary to all of that. Scripture is very clear that there is one God and only one God, there is one Lord and only one Lord, there is one inspired revelation, the Bible, and it is the only God-given revelation. There is only one accurate and correct interpretation of the Bible and there is therefore in the Bible only one plan of salvation. Any suggestion that alters or mixes those singular truths is a corruption with error that has only damning results.

In the text before us, we have a very clear defense of the singularity and purity of the unique gospel of Jesus Christ and it is given by our Lord Himself. The passage provides a clear and unambiguous

statement of the exclusivity of the gospel and its incompatibility with Judaism in particular and if it is incompatible with Judaism, which does have at least Old Testament connections, it is certainly incompatible with every religion that has no such Old Testament connections. There are a lot of people today who would like to believe that Christians and Jews today have a lot in common, but those Jews who only to Judaism in its current forms, even the form of Judaism that existed in the time of our Lord, have no common religious ground and no common spiritual ground with true Christians. Any form of Judaism without Jesus Christ is a false religion. It is empty, bankrupt, damning, it might as well be Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism or Atheism.

Now as we return to Mark and to the text before us, we remember verses 13 to 17. In verses 13 to 17, our Lord called Matthew Levi to be His disciple. This is an inexplicable breech of religious expectation and separation, as far as the Pharisees and the scribes are concerned. They would have nothing to do with a tax collector, such as Levi Matthew. They viewed tax collectors as the lowest of the low, traitors, unclean outcasts. They couldn't go to the temple. They couldn't go to the synagogue. They were like lepers. You were to avoid them at all costs and also to avoid all the people associated with them that fall into the general category of sinners. The Pharisees in espousing their religion of separation and external righteousness and holiness, made sure that visibly they never came near anybody like that. And here is Jesus calling such a man, the worst of the worst, the lowest of the low, to be an official disciple, even to be listed among the Apostles, not only a learner but a proclaimer of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This shock cannot be measured. Jesus did it openly and publicly when He was walking pass the tax booth where Matthew was sitting, everybody saw it. It was a flagrant breech of righteous separation. The Pharisees then have concluded, this just adds to their firmness in that conclusion, that Jesus is espousing a religious view very different than theirs. It's really important that we understand that. Eventually they killed Him for it. They were convinced that not only was His religion different than theirs, their came from God and His came from Satan. They would be the first ones to say there is no compatibility between Judaism and the message of Jesus Christ. It is a message foreign to us. It is alien to us. It is contrary to us. It is destructive to our religion. It is such a threat to our religion that its purveyor, this man Jesus, needs to be killed. And, of course, they were right, they're absolutely right. There is no compatibility between Judaism, the apostate form of Judaism that existed then and has continued to exist without Christ through the centuries and exist today.

The true religion of the Old Testament was fulfilled in Christ. The Judaism that rejected Christ is a false religion. It still is, it was then, and they knew it. In fact, they knew that Jesus was so adversarial to them that the only way to deal with Him was to murder Him.

Now this particular section of Scripture is important enough that Matthew records it in Matthew 9:14 to 17 and Luke records it in Luke 5:33 to 39. Both Matthew and Luke, as well as Mark, put this incident in which Jesus affirms the exclusivity of the gospel immediately after the call of Matthew. So when

three gospel writers do it, it's pretty sure that they happened in immediate sequence. Right on the heals then of Jesus declaring that He had the authority to forgive sin, and then demonstrating that the sinners that He forgave were the wretched sinners, the worst of the worst, Jesus then has made crystal clear that what He's preaching is completely opposite of what the Pharisees are preaching. What the Pharisees preached is that you work your own way by means of self-righteousness, His message is so different, so opposite, He feels comfortable with the worst sinners, He offers forgiveness to the worst sinners, this is an outrage to them. And so, on the heals of that act in regard to Matthew Levi comes this text in which Jesus spells out just exactly how incompatible His message is with Judaism.

Let's begin in verse 18. "John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting, and they came and said to Him, to Jesus, ‘Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?' And Jesus said to them, ‘While the bridegroom is with them, the attendants of the bridegroom cannot fast, can they? So long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day. 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 worst tear results. No one puts new wine into old wineskins, otherwise the wine will burst the sins and the wine is lost, and the skins as well. But one puts new wine into fresh wineskins.'"

What do we have here? We have a discussion about the exclusivity of the gospel, about the incompatibility with the gospel, the inability of the message of Jesus Christ to be mixed with apostate Judaism or any other false religion.

Now it all starts, we're going to look at three points, it all starts with a critical accusation. It looks like a question in verse 18, it really is a kind of critical, rhetorical statement, verse 18, "John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting and they came and said to Him, ‘Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?'"

Now frequently, conflict with Jesus and the leaders of Israel, the Pharisees and the scribes, is built around questions. Those questions seem most of the time to have to do with Jesus' contrary behavior. Either He's violating one of their laws, traditions, or He's doing something on the Sabbath that He shouldn't be doing, or there's some behavior in which His disciples are engaged, which is a breech of their tradition. This launches the conflict, and that is the case here.

It's pretty simple. "John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting." Now I need to say a little bit about that. I don't want you to dismiss the John's disciples part. They play a big role in this scene. In fact, in Matthew's account, Matthew 9 and verse 14, He only mentions them and doesn't mention the Pharisees and the scribes, so they are a main player in this query. And you might be surprised because John's disciples refers to John the Baptist. You might think that everybody who was a

follower of John the Baptist would then have become a follower of Jesus, right? Wasn't it John who said in John one, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world," wasn't John endeavoring to have everybody know that he must decrease and Christ must increase, as he said in John 3? Didn't the people who follow John the Baptist shift to Jesus? Answer...No...no. In fact, if you go back to chapter 1 and verse 5, all the country of Judea was going out to him, that is to John the Baptist mentioned in verse 4 who was in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. People went out to him, all the people of Jerusalem, as well as all the country of Judea, they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River confessing their sin. So there was a mass of people that were flowing in a steady stream out of the towns and cities and villages and countryside of Judea, out of the main center of Jerusalem to John and they were listening to him, believing he was a prophet who was announcing the coming of the Kingdom and the Messiah. They wanted to be ready. He was an effective preacher of repentance. They would repent. They would be baptized because they wanted to be ready when Messiah came.

They didn't necessarily shift their allegiance to the Messiah. I'm sure most of them didn't even know who he was since it was only one day he appeared there and that John identified Him as the Lamb of God. And John was out there for months and months and months. In fact, even in the nineteenth chapter of Acts, long after these events had taken place, we still meet a group of the disciples who didn't even know about Jesus Christ.

So we're not surprised that some followers of John, some eager Jews who wanted to make sure they didn't miss the Messiah and the Messianic Kingdom, were honest enough to confess their sins, and wanted to be baptized to get ready for the arrival of Messiah. And what it perhaps did for them was ramp up their devotion to the traditions of their religion. It didn't shift them to Christ necessarily, but it did make them more conscientious about their religious observances, so they perhaps got a little closer to the Pharisees. If, in fact, they were really hoping for the Messianic Kingdom and wanting to be ready when Messiah came, they might have elevated their religion a little bit to get to the highest level, and so here they are, associated with the Pharisees. Perhaps in their asking the question, the attitude is not as sinister as it is with the Pharisees and the scribes. We already know that they want Jesus dead, the disciples of John may not have made that conclusion. They're associated with them not in the sinister attitude toward Jesus, but in their devotion to their religion.

Both groups are dutifully observing the religious traditions regarding fasting...fasting means going without food. Both are deeply disturbed that Jesus' disciples aren't doing this. They aren't fasting. In fact, they look like they're partying. I mean, we just saw that, right? They just came out of a big banquet. Verse 16, Jesus is there with His disciples and they're eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners. This is such outrageous conduct in the eyes of the Pharisees and the scribes.

Why aren't they fasting? How can they be celebrating? And how in the world can they be celebrating so happy, so joyful, feasting with those kinds of people? The question is really not intended as an

objective question, it is really a severe criticism. It is a severe criticism. And they want to put Jesus and His disciples on the hot seat. Why is Jesus running so contrary to the current religion. Who does He think He is? Why does He ignore the required separation from sinners? Why does He ignore the required fasting? And when I say required, I mean it was really required.

In Luke's version, Luke says the disciples of John often fast and offer prayers and the two were linked together. And the disciples of the Pharisees do the same. Why don't You do that? But the truth of the matter was, there was only one fast in the Old Testament required. That's right. In the entire Old Testament, there's only one required fast. According to Leviticus 16:29 to 31, it was required that on the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, they fast. In fact, it says in that text, "You're to humble your soul, or afflict your soul, and the Hebrew word used there is commonly used of restraining or refraining from eating. Only one fast is prescribed, only one fast is demanded.

However, there are many occasions in the Old Testament where people fasted voluntarily, and always connected with sorrowful, heart-breaking prayer. You read about that in Esther 4. You read about it in Isaiah 58 and I'll refer to that in a little bit. You read about it in 1 Kings 21; Joel chapter 1. And through the years, the Old Testament and the intertestimental period, and up until the time of Jesus, people did voluntarily fast to pray, as people do even now. Christian people do when they are exercised over something that captures their heart to such a degree that they have no interest in eating. But in the Jewish history, you can find one day fasts, you can find three-day fasts. You can find seven-day fasts. You can find twenty-one day fasts. You can find even 40 day fasts, such as Exodus 34, Deuteronomy 9, and 1 Kings 19, and that's what Jesus did. He was fasting 40 days when He was tempted in the wilderness. So there are examples of voluntary fasts.

The Pharisees, however, had gone beyond that and they had designed a twice a week fast day...Monday and Thursday....Monday and Thursday. And you remember in Luke 18 the Pharisee went into the temple to pray, he said, "I thank You that I'm not like other men, like this Publican, I fast twice a week." That was their prescription. Not in the Old Testament, not in the Scripture, but they required it. They were in to external behavior. In fact, the three major things that they did publically, was give their alms, money, to the poor, pray and fast. It was ostentatious, it was public, it was hypocritical. Jesus addressed the hypocrisy of it in His great Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 6. He says in verse 2, "Concerning their alms giving, when you give to the poor, don't sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men." Verse 5, "When you pray, don't be like the hypocrites, love to stand and pray in the synagogues in the street corners that they may be seen by men." And then with regard to the third which is fasting, verse 16, "Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. What is it? They're seen by men. But you when you fast, anoint your head, wash your face so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

It was just for show. And every Monday and every Thursday, they fasted and they looked disheveled so the people would know they were fasting. As Paul put it in Galatians 6 :12, "They loved to make an open display in the flesh."

Now remember, only one fast was really required. All others were purely voluntary and they had to come from the heart.

Well they had been violating that for a long time. I mentioned Isaiah 58, when the Lord indicts is people in that chapter for their false religion, this is what He says in Isaiah 58:3, "The people say this, ‘Why have we fasted and you do not see? Why have we humbled ourselves and you do not notice? Where are You, God? We're fasting, we're fasting.'"

"And God's response is, ‘Yeah, you fast for contention and strife and to strike with a wicked fist. You don't fast to make your voice heard on high. Is it a fast like this that I choose? A day for a man to humble himself? For bowing one's head like a reed? For spreading out sackcloth and ashes as a bed? Is this not the fast which I choose? To loosen the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke? To let the oppressed go free? To break every yoke?" In other words, it's not the ashes and spreading out a blanket and making a public display, it's the virtue, loosening the bonds of wickedness, undoing the bands of the yoke, letting the oppressed go free, breaking every yoke, dividing your bread with the hungry, bringing the homeless poor into your house, covering the naked? Then your light will break out like the dawn and your recovering will speedily spring forth your righteousness will go before you. The glory of the Lord will be Your rear guard. Then you will call and the Lord will answer, you will cry and He wills say, ‘Here I am.' When you fast comes from the heart and manifests itself in spiritual virtue, not in externals."

They were really good at this. They had been good at it for a long time. It was part of their phony superficial, self-righteous display. But to them, it was their religion. And so the combination of the disciples of John, the Pharisees of John come along and they say, "We all do this but Your disciples do not fast. You are completely out of touch with the required religion."

By the way, empty ritual is always the enemy of true godliness. How can you do this? How can you violate this? How can you flaunt this behavior?

Well the critical accusation deserves an answer, so you get a corrective answer from Jesus in verses 19 and 20. "And Jesus said to them," by the way, this is our Lord's interpretation of the disciples' action with regard to not fasting. This is Jesus' own interpretation. And He does a simple illustration for them which they would all understand to make His point. "While the bridegroom is with them, the attendants of the bridegroom cannot fast. Can they, so long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast." Everyone would understand that. You don't fast at a wedding. You don't fast at a

wedding. A wedding is a celebration. The attendants would be the best man and the other attendants. The best friends of the bridegroom, the ones responsible for the wedding plans, the ones responsible to carry off the event, to make all the arrangements, and all of that. Matthew adds, "They don't mourn and fast because mourning and praying was connected with fasting."

This is not a time for mourning. This is not a time for sorrow. Yom Kippur was a time for sorrow over sin, the Day of Atonement, but a wedding, by the way, lasted up to seven days. Once the bridegroom arrived with his attendants, the wedding was launched. Fasting was out. Drop an E into the word, feasting took over. There were even ancient rabbinic rules forbidding wedding guests to fast. Why? Because these people who were such hypocrites who wanted to put on their display of spirituality would even go to a wedding and say, "Well, I'm sorrow, I can't eat, I'm fasting."

So the rabbis had to make rules that you couldn't fast at a wedding. That is why it is so emphatic in verse 19, that they cannot fast and then repeat it at the end of the verse, "They cannot fast." It's emphatic, you can't do that, it's not acceptable, it's not allowable.

This is not a place for a broken, grieving heart, for sorrow. Even Scripture says, "Rejoice with those that rejoice, Ecclesiastes 3:4, the familiar...there's a time to weep, a time to laugh, a time to mourn, and a time to dance. So the Pharisees and the scribes that fasted for show, the disciples of John were part of that as well. There was no true brokenness over their sin. There was no real compassionate prayer for those who suffer that sort of pushed away the desire for anything to eat. This kind of phony fasting has nothing to do with what's going on in the lives of these disciples because they are in the presence of the bridegroom. Can't be done.

Well they would understand the analogy. An old Jewish document called "The Megulatte Tahonit(???) is...that means literally the scroll of fasting, gives instruction about fasting. It says fasting is forbidden on all days devoted to happy celebrations.

Now the Messiah is never called the bridegroom in the Old Testament. The Messiah is never called the bridegroom in the Old Testament, but in the New Testament, He certainly is identified as the bridegroom and the church is the bride, and you have it most graphically in the parable our Lord told in Matthew 25 about the ten virgins waiting for the coming of the bridegroom who is designated there as the Lord in His return.

There are, however, all through the Old Testament beautiful images of weddings that refer to God's relationship to His people. And particularly to God's relationship to His people in Messianic times. Isaiah has several of them, Ezekiel as well.

So our Lord is simply saying, in effect, the Messiah's here, this is not a time to fast. It is completely inappropriate for Jesus' disciples to fast and moan while He, the long-awaited Messiah is present. He

has come. He has arrived this day as He said in the synagogue in Nazareth, the Scripture is fulfilled in your ears, He is present. The fasting of the Pharisees, the fasting of the followers of John the Baptist, that's what's out of place, completely out of touch with God's purpose and what God is doing, completely out of touch with the reality that the Messiah was there. You guys are the old and the out of touch. They all understand there was a difference. The Jews thought they were right, and we know they were wrong.

Their religious system is totally bankrupt. They're externalists, pursuing a relationship with God through their own works. They can't recognize the Messiah, they think He's from Satan. They think that what He's espousing is a different religion that has to be stopped. They don't get it. He's the truth. He's the life. He's the only way to God. He is the Messiah, the Son of God, the Savior and His disciples are celebrating and they should celebrate. And that is not a time to fast.

But, verse 20 says, "The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them and then they will fast in that day. That is really a stunning statement. The days will come. There will be a time in the future when the wedding joy will end. To put it simply, the bridegroom will be taken away. What does that mean? The verb *epairo*conveys the idea of a sudden violent snatching away. The Messiah will be snatched away. What does that refer to? Well Isaiah said the same thing in Isaiah 53:8, listen to what Isaiah said. "By oppression and judgment, He, the Messiah, is taken away," same expression. Cut off out of the land of the living, that means killed for the transgression of my people to whom the stroke was due. He will be taken away, He will be killed in our place. This then is the first reference by Jesus to His death in the gospel of Mark.

When that happens, then they will fast...then they will fast. And it won't be a ritual, and it won't be a Monday, Thursday show, it will be heartbreak, it will be grief.

Little doubt that when Jesus was arrested and when He was executed, the disciples were crushed beyond all comprehension. The prophecy here is that they would fast. I'm sure they did. Which explains why when Jesus met two of them in Luke 24 on the road to Emmaus, you remember He was talking with them, they didn't know who He was. And they were telling the sad story about how the Messiah had been killed and that they had hoped that He would be the one. And now all hope is crushed. And in their sadness they go to their house in Emmaus and they invite Jesus to come in because it's late in the day and He comes in and they sit down, and then it says, most interestingly, this is their house with their supplies, Jesus broke bread and gave it to them. Now what a curiosity that is which is probably a good indication that on their own they wouldn't have eaten.

And then when He left them, He appears to the disciples who were gathered together later in the Upper Room and after His appearance to them, it says He took a piece of fish and ate it. Again probably to inaugurate or initiate their eating because once He had come out of the grave, the fast needed to end, didn't it? There would come a time when He would be taken away and they would

fast. But this is not that time yet. It's not that time to fast.

Judaism at its most devout level, Judaism at its most self-righteous level, Judaism as the extreme religion, Judaism with all its connection to the Old Testament, all its desire to revere the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, that Judaism is completely out of touch with God...completely out of touch with God's salvation. Purpose completely out of touch with Son of God, completely out of touch with the gospel.

They were in to self-righteousness. He preached grace. They were in to denying that they were sinful. He preached repentance from sin. They were proud of their religiosity, He preached humility. They were in to external ceremony, He preached a transformed heart. They held tightly to the Old, He offered the New. They loved the approval of men. He offered the approval of God. They had ritual, He offered a relationship.

And then to make clear to them how different these two were, we come to the clarifying analogies, clarifying analogies, verses 21 to 22 and we'll add a third one, and in His inimitable way He uses analogies that they would readily understand that need virtually no explanation. "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. Anybody who washes anything at any time that is made out of a natural fabric whether it's linen, cotton, or whether it's wool, some other form of animal hair woven together understands that things shrink. No synthetic products in the ancient world, things shrink. So everybody would know that if you take a piece 9 of unshrunk cloth, and by the way, Matthew describes this and Luke describes it as well, their words are a little bit different and that's the genius of the New Testament that if a committee had put it together, they would make it all match, but any teacher knows that when you're teaching something like this and you're drawing out an analogy, you repeat yourself and you nuance it and you say it two or three ways until they get the point and each of the writers picks up the unique elements of it, together you get the whole thing. But it's essentially exactly the same. You take a piece of unshrunk cloth, cut it into a patch. You don't do that to sew it into a new garment, otherwise the patch when it is washed, or becomes wet and dries out will pull away from it, the new from the old and a worse tear results. This is a foolish mix. You can't mix new patch, unshrunk with an old piece of cloth. Apostate Judaism's rituals and ceremonies are a worn-out old garment and you cannot patch the holes in it with a piece of the gospel. It's not compatible. Jesus didn't come with a message to patch up the old system. He came with a message to replace it all together.

He brought a new internal gospel of repentance and forgiveness by grace that cannot be mixed with the old Judaism of tradition and self-righteous works, or with any other religion. The old garment, by the way, is not God's Law, God's holy Law, it's not the Old Testament, it is the religion of Judaism and the pieces of the gospel can't be stitched into it. Jesus said this essentially in the parables of Matthew 13 verses 45...verses 44 and 45, when He said there was a man who found a treasure in a field and

sold everything and bought the treasure. And a man who found a pearl of great price and sold everything to buy the pearl. Once you discover the gospel which is the treasure and the pearl, you can only purchase it if you sell everything. There's no hanging on to any other form of religion. Here is gospel uniqueness, it cannot accommodate itself even to Judaism.

There's a lot of talk these days about conferences between Jews and Christians and certainly we want to love them...and love them from the depths of our heart, we want to bring them to the knowledge of the truth, but whenever there is a conference between Christians and Jews, I think the Christians are obligated to tell the Jews that their religion cannot save them. That's what we ought to say at the conference. The Messiah has come and by His death and resurrection, offers forgiveness and salvation if they will abandon their hope in their own works and their own traditions and leave that religion behind. No mixture of the gospel or any other religion is possible, it is absolutely unique. It is grace and grace alone.

And then He gives them another illustration, essentially, pointing out the same thing. "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." You read about this in Joshua chapter 9 verses 4 and 13, this process. They would take a goat, they would kill the goat, take the hide of the goat, use the neck as a spout, sew up the places where the legs were and any openings and then they would have a big, big goatskin kind of pouch, fresh leather, and they would fill it with new wine. They would leave it there for a period of time and the bitterness of the dregs would go to the bottom and settle in the bottom and they would pour it out of one skin into another new skin and they would keep pouring it and pouring it and each time they would pour it they would do this time and time again, more of the dregs would be out and remained in the bottom, and from that they would make vinegar and things like that. But eventually they would get a clear wine with no dregs left. That was the process. It was really important that these skins be supple and that they be able to contain the wine.

If you had old skins lying around that had been used and reused and reused and were lying without being used for a period of time, they would crack, they would become brittle and when they were used again they would break open, all the wine would be lost. That they would completely understand, it was something they were very, very familiar with. They would just keep pouring it until the bottom was clear, no dregs were left and they had the pure wine that they were after.

Our Lord is saying you can't pour the Christian gospel into the wineskins, the old brittle, cracked, split useless wineskins of Judaism, the new wine of the gospel is incompatible. In Galatians 5:4 He said, "You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by Law. If you're seeking at all to be justified by what you do, you are severed from Christ. It pulls loose, you can't patch grace into a law system. The Christian gospel stands alone as the only way of salvation, incompatible with all other and every other religious system. It comes by grace through faith.

Now what is the message in all of this? It's simply this, I don't know where you are in your life, my friend, but don't think you can add Jesus to your religion, you can't, it's a total replacement. The whole system has to go. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life, no man comes to the Father but by Me. There's no salvation in any other name," Acts 4:12, than the name of Christ. Christianity is not compatible with Judaism, it's not even compatible with false forms of Christianity, to say nothing of all the religions that are non-Christian. The religion of the Pharisees and the scribes, the religion of the disciples of John, that was old skin, couldn't contain the gospel. But rather than believe, rather than receive, they kept their dead, brittle, tattered, old wineskins and they refused the gospel.

Our Lord gave a third illustration and Luke records it, so let's look at Luke 5:39, we'll close with that. Luke records the third illustration and it's connected to the idea of the wine. Luke says in verse 39, this is the parallel account, "And," after just referring to the wineskins issue, He closes in verse 39, "And no one after drinking old wine wishes for new, for He says the old is good enough." Wow, how insightful is that? How insightful is that?

Jesus said it's very natural for people to hang on to their familiar religion. The Jews with their old and ancient traditions, passed down generation to generation, to generation, father to son, on and on and on and on, so deeply ingrained, all the rituals, all the ceremonies, all the behaviors to which they had clung so tightly, they don't release them easily. It has become such a part of their lives. They have cultivated such a taste for their own religion that if you offer them something else, they're not interested in it. They're so self-satisfied with the familiar. They've been drinking a certain religious wine for years and they're not at all interested in some new kind, no matter what it promises. This is such a deadly thing, a cultivated, deeply cultivated love of false religion is so hard to break. In fact, they see another religion, even the truth as a threat. The Judaism of Jesus day, boy it was strongly satisfying to the flesh, as false religion can be, usually is. And they wanted nothing new.

Tragedy results when you try to patch Christianity in. Tragedy...eternal tragedy results when you cling to the old because it's familiar, you like the taste of it. The Christian gospel is the gospel of Jesus Christ, the only way of salvation by faith in Him through grace alone. If you're holding to anything else, it will go to hell with you, but never to heaven. Let go, sell everything and buy the pearl, buy the treasure.

Lord, Your Word again is so rich, insightful, penetrating, clear, we thank You from the depths of our hearts for this rich revelation. What can we say? We feed on it day after day after day, year after year and it is sweet, sweeter than honey from the honeycomb, precious, more precious than gold and find gold, as the psalmist said. It is life to us, blessing, joy. And taking it in, we rejoice, but we also bear a responsibility to send it out. We learn not as an end but as a means, we learn the truth so that we can love the truth, embrace the truth, rejoice in the truth, praise You for what You've done, but also with the responsibility to proclaim it. Give us t he boldness and the opportunity to declare the exclusivity,

the uniqueness, the matchless distinctiveness of the gospel of Christ. Open up opportunities for us to do that, even in the days ahead, this week and we'll thank You in Your Son's name. Amen.

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