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

The Uniqueness of the Gospel
Scripture: Luke 5:33-39
Code: 42-68

I have much to say to you, this morning, and I want you to turn to your Bibles, Luke 5 verses 33 to 39. This is a passage of some length, at least for me, to cover, but I'm going to cover it this morning because it needs to be presented as a unit. It is a very, very important portion of Scripture...Luke 5:33 to 39. And let me read these verses to you.

"And they said to Him, 'The disciples of John often fast and offer prayers; the disciples of the Pharisees also do the same; but Yours eat and drink.' And Jesus said to them, 'You cannot make the attendants of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them, can you? But the days will come and when the bridegroom is taken away from them, then they will fast in those days.' And He was also telling them a parable. No one tears a piece from a new garment and puts it in an old garment, otherwise he will both tear the new and the piece from the new will not match the old. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins, otherwise the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled out and the skins will be ruined. But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins. And no one, after drinking old wine wishes for new; for he says, 'The old is good enough.'"

Now in the reading of that you obviously have some questions raised in your minds. And perhaps the singular question is...what's this all about? And what it's about is essentially the title of the message today, "The uniqueness of the gospel...The uniqueness of the gospel." And I want you to understand this, it is critical, it has far-reaching implications. The gospel of Jesus Christ, the gospel of God, as Paul calls it, the gospel of grace, the message of forgiveness through the work of Jesus Christ, the gospel which we know and love and believe is unique. And I mean that in the purest sense of the word. When I say the gospel is unique, I mean to say that it is incompatible with any and all other religious belief. It stands alone. The idea that the Christian gospel can mix with or blend with any other religious system in any way is absolutely wrong. You cannot mix the gospel with Roman Catholic or orthodox sacramentalism. You cannot mix the gospel with liberalism. You can't mix the gospel with Mormonism, or the religion of the Jehovah's Witness, or Christian Science or any other religion. You cannot mix the gospel even with the religion of Judaism. The gospel is absolutely exclusive. It mingles with no other religion. It mixes with no other religion. It accommodates no other religion. In fact, it replaces all other religion. The gospel is absolutely exclusive. Now this needs to be emphatically understood in a time which exalts diversity of belief, tolerance of religion, pluralism, inclusivism and even universalism which essentially says we're all headed the same direction.

Now we know there is one God, there is one authoritative book, the Bible. There is one Redeemer of souls, the Lord Jesus Christ. There is one gospel, the gospel of grace and faith. And that singularity of the Christian gospel means that any intrusion that mixes or alters the singularity of the gospel renders it void, nullifies it. It stands alone. Being a Christian is to the exclusion of all other religious systems, or you're not a Christian because all other religious systems are systems of works, to one degree or another, of ritual, ceremony, or human works earning favor with God. We are here again then, as we so often do in our studies of the Bible, defending the purity of the gospel. The passage before us today is very, very important and very focused on this very subject, the uniqueness of the gospel. And what this passage does for us is demonstrate that the gospel of Jesus Christ, the gospel of salvation is incompatible with Judaism, and we would assume that Judaism is its nearest kin. But we're going to find that Jesus didn't come to add to Judaism. He didn't come to alter Judaism. He didn't come to blend with Judaism. He came to bring the gospel which replaced it. And here Jesus will show us the bankruptcy, the emptiness and the incompatibility of even Judaism with the gospel. Again I say, the Christian gospel cannot be mixed or mingled or blended or added to any religion, any religious system, even Judaism.

Now this becomes eminently clear in the passage and it points us in the direction of understanding why there was such an ongoing conflict between the religious leaders of Judaism and Jesus, which ultimately led to them getting the Romans to execute Him. The hostility continued to escalate to a fever pitch until they managed to incite an entire crowd to scream for Jesus' blood in an irrational call for His execution. And the hostility was based upon the fact that Jesus came with the gospel that totally replaced the religion of Judaism. That must be understood..

Now we already have plenty of indication that the hostility has begun. If you go back into the prior passage in chapter 5, the one we studied in our last look at Luke's gospel, you remember that Jesus called a man named Levi, starting in verse 27, also named Matthew. We know him as Matthew, the writer of the first gospel. He called a man named Levi to Himself. He forgave his sins. He saved him. He made him a disciple. And then Matthew Levi put on a feast, a celebration, a banquet, a festival, a party at his house because he was so excited about his salvation, he was so excited that he had been called to be a disciple of Jesus Christ he called all his friends together. Well all his friends were the social riff-raff. He was at the lowest level of society as a tax collector. He was more hated than anybody else in Jewish society because he worked for the Roman government and was an extortioner and a crook who was robbing his own people to pay a foreign Gentile oppressor and to get rich at the expense of his people. And so tax collectors were the scum.

The only people they could associate with were thugs, enforcers, prostitutes and other sorts of criminals. Matthew was happy about his conversion, elated about his conversion, about being forgiven, being called to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, he called a party. Invited his friends and verse 29 says there was a great crowd of tax gatherers and other people. The other gospel tells us "other sinners," just the people I just named for you, the outcasts, the despicable, the despised of society

and they were all at the dinner. And verse 30, "The Pharisees and the scribes began grumbling at the disciples of Jesus saying, 'Why do you eat and drink with the tax gatherers and sinners," and here we find another indication of the terrible breach between Jesus and the religious leaders.

The religious leaders were self-righteous. The religious leaders had external parade of their supposed righteousness. And one of the things they did was disassociate themselves from all people that they deemed unclean. They were the sanctimonious. They were the righteous. And they didn't soil themselves by going into a Gentile house or hanging around with tax gatherers, prostitutes and other thugs and criminals. And Jesus associated with those people all the time. In fact, He basically gained the title, "the friend of sinners and tax collectors...the friend of drunkards," because those were the kind of people He went to. And when the question was asked, Jesus answered in verse 31 and said, "It's not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick." And this is sarcasm, He said, "You who think you're well don't call for the doctor. These people are sick and they know they're sick. They're sinful and they know they're sinful and they have called for the spiritual physician and I have not come...verse 32...to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." And again it's sarcasm. You are the righteous, you are the self-styled righteous, your righteousness won't save you, it's your righteousness that damns you. It's the wrong righteousness, it's the righteousness of your own self-invention and I can't help you, but I have come to sinners, the poor prisoners, blind and oppressed that He referred to from Isaiah 61 earlier in His message in the synagogue in Nazareth.

So we already know that there is a huge gulf between the religion of Judaism concerned with staying away from sinners, and the gospel of Jesus concerned with being with sinners. The religion of Judaism concerned with self-righteousness, the gospel of Jesus concerned with heart righteousness. The religion of Judaism concerned about what men think, and the gospel of Jesus concerned about what God thinks. The religion of Judaism concerned only with the outside, the gospel concerned with the inside. Huge gulf exists and it is very natural then to transition into the passage that I just read to you because in this passage Jesus makes it very clear that in fact the gospel is incompatible with Judaism, that what these Pharisees and scribes are seeing that looks to them to be a kind of religious behavior that is the very opposite of their religion in fact is accurate. The behavior is different because the gospel is different. Here we have then the uniqueness of the gospel by demonstration of its incompatibility with Judaism. And here in this text, Jesus points out the bankruptcy, the emptiness, the incompatibility of the Jewish religion of His day with the gospel. And this is really something we need to keep in our minds because today in this inclusivistic mentality, everybody wants to give people credit for their religion and maybe we kind of introduce Jesus into it but we don't upset it. The fact of the matter is, the gospel can only if it is to be effective, it can only replace all other religious systems.

Now Jesus had just dealt a severe blow to Jewish Pharisaical legalism because Jesus says He's from God. Jesus says He speaks for God. Jesus proves He is God because He healed a paralytic and forgave his sin, two things that only God can do. So here is God and what is God doing? God is

calling the riff-raff, the scum, the wretched, the miserable people as His disciples and God in human flesh, if in fact Jesus is God, this one who supposedly comes from God, this one who represents God, this one who claims to be God is in direct opposition to the religion of Judaism. What they're wondering is why He doesn't pay attention to the traditions and why He's so concerned about the heart and why He doesn't associate with the scribes and Pharisees instead of the tax gatherers and prostitutes. They are shocked at His breach of religious etiquette and religious tradition. And so it's right on the heels of their shock over the whole incident with Matthew and the riff-raff in Matthew's house and Jesus' association with them, it's right on the heels of that that Luke follows up with this conversation with Jesus and these people.

And by the way, Matthew and Mark record the same scene in the same sequence which leads me to believe that these are sequential events. If the celebration that Matthew held took place all day long, this may have happened that evening. If it took place all day long and all night long, this may have happened the next day. But I think they're very close in time that perhaps they were linked so that they occurred at the same time. Another reason I believe that is because verse 33 says, "And they said to Him..." And if you're leaping somewhere else in time, you need to identify who they are. But if you're following immediately in sequence, :"they" takes you back to the Pharisees and scribes who were talking to the disciples in the prior incident. So perhaps later that very day, in the evening, or perhaps early the next day this comes in sequence. And it provides a perfect opportunity for Jesus to demonstrate the uniqueness of the gospel.

Now conflict...this is actually the third conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees in this chapter. The first conflict with them came over His healing of the paralyzed man earlier in the chapter. The second conflict comes at the house of Matthew, or outside when the disciples come out and are questioned by the Pharisees. Here is the third conflict and the stakes are raised every time...every time. In the house where the paralytic was healed, there's no real direct confrontation of the Pharisees. But there is at the time of the feast of Matthew. Now we have an even more intense confrontation as Jesus speaks directly to them about the bankruptcy, the emptiness and the incompatibility of Judaism with the gospel.

Now as we look at the passage, verses 33 to 39, I just want to flow through three elements, three simple elements...the inquisition, or the inquiry, the question that's asked, and the interpretation, how Jesus interprets the behavior in light of the question, and then the illustrations, just three simple points. Let's look at the inquisition, first of all.

Verse 33, "And they said to Him, 'The disciples of John often fast and offer prayers; the disciples of the Pharisees, or those of the Pharisees, also do the same; but Yours eat and drink.'" Now what they're doing is pointing at a very obvious breach of the religion of Judaism. The religion of Judaism calls for prayers and fasting, we're not talking about voluntary prayer and voluntary fasting. They had prescribed prayers and prescribed fastings. They had a routine, a daily routine of ritual prayers that

were prayed at certain hours during the day. And I'm not going to take time to go into all of that pattern of prayer, although I will comment a bit on the fasting because we've discussed their prayer patterns in other contexts. But there were certain hours of the day when they stopped everything, went into a public place, and routinely went through their prayer list. And they did that in a fashion to demonstrate their supposed spirituality before men. These were required, routine, ritual prayers which were either read or recited from memorization. They were in that sense heartless. They also had fasts. In fact, it was part of the Pharisaic system to fast every Monday and every Thursday of every week. You remember Luke 18, the Pharisee went into the temple to pray and he was saying, "I thank You, O God, that I'm not like this lousy tax collector, I fast twice a week..." And he was telling God how righteous he was because he fasts twice a week. Monday was fast day, and Thursday was fast day. And it may well have been that Matthew's party was on Monday, or on Thursday and they're saying, "What in the world are You doing eating and drinking when all the rest of us are fasting? Don't You understand the tradition?" Which they, of course, had deemed to be the true religion of God, as all false religious do.

Now just look at verse 33, "And they said to Him," that shouldn't pose any question, but it does because we don't know who the "they" are, unless we look back a little bit. Luke seems to use "they" to take us back to the Pharisees and the scribes. They are the group in verse 30 that had just encountered the disciples and "they", no doubt, refers to them. So Luke poses the question from the Pharisees and the scribes. And they say, "All the disciples of John fast and pray; and our disciples also do the same, but Yours eat and drink." So the Pharisees and the scribes appear as the antagonists in the prior passages and "they" relates to those prior references to them.

However, Matthew says, Matthew 9:14, "Disciples of John came to Him saying..." Well, you might say, "Who is it? Is it the scribes and Pharisees, or is it the disciples of John? Is this a contradiction?" No, Mark who records the same incident, chapter 2 verse 18, and John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting and they came and said to Him. That is very typical of what we call synoptic gospel accounts. Luke emphasizes the Pharisees posing the question. Matthew emphasizes the disciples of John posing the question. And Mark says they both posed the question. Very simply, the disciples of John were associated with the Pharisees and the scribes. They were hanging out together. They were committed to the same patterns of prayers and fasting. And they came together and they asked the question together. Perhaps as a group would do...Yeah, why don't Your disciples...Yeah, that's what I...I want to know that...and the question was coming from people who were scribes and Pharisees and people who were disciples of John. Both groups.

Now, this is interesting, both groups obviously observed these fasts and prayers. It says, "The disciples of John often fast and offer prayers; the disciples of the Pharisees also do the same." They have a pattern, they have a routine and they keep this and "Your disciples ignore it," they said to Jesus. I mean, this is an outrage. Don't You understand? This is our religion. This is the true religion of God, they believed, and You're in violation of it. How are we supposed to accept You as the

spokesman of God, as the One who is the prophet of God, as the One who is the Messiah of God, as the One who is God incarnate, the healer of diseases, the forgiver of sins? How are we supposed to accept You when You don't even observe our religion?

Now I need to explain something about the disciples of John because when you think of the disciples of John you probably think of the good guys. And what are the good guys doing with these bad guys, these legalists? Well it's not strange to understand the mingling together and I'll tell you why. John the prophet, you remember, came in the third chapter of Luke, we studied it. He came into the region around the Jordan and he was preaching repentance. He was saying, "Messiah's coming, Messiah's coming, the Kingdom's coming, the Kingdom's coming. You better be ready when the King comes to set up His Kingdom and you better repent, better repent. If you don't repent, the wrath of God is going to come upon you." Remember? A very strong message. And it tells us in Luke 3 starting in verse 3 and going down to verse 15 that everybody in the Jordan area was coming out there. One of the other writer says, "All Judea was going to John." Literally thousands of people, if not tens of thousands were going out there, they were listening to John preaching repentance, and getting ready for Messiah. "Come, repent and be forgiven and get your heart ready for Messiah." And he had many thousands and thousands of disciples.

There was a day, you remember in John's ministry, not all of those people would have been there that day, when Jesus showed up. And that was the day that John points to Jesus and says, "Behold...what?...the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." And John wanted his disciples to then move their allegiance to Jesus. In John 3:28 to 30 John said, "He must increase and I must decrease. I've got to fade away and you need to move toward the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ." And Jesus, you remember, was baptized by John and the Father said, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased, and the Spirit descended upon Him," and it was clearly recognizable to John that this in fact was the Messiah. And so John wanted to transition his people to the one who had to increase, Jesus Christ.

But not all his followers were there that day and not all his followers were convinced Jesus was the Messiah. And not all of the disciples of John followed Jesus. But I'll tell you what many of them did, because we meet them in this context. They made a serious commitment down there at the river. The confessed their sin. They asked for forgiveness. They wanted to be acceptable when the Messiah came and set up His Kingdom so they could get in the Kingdom. So they cranked up their religious involvement a few notches. And how would you do that in Judaism? You would start hanging around with whom? The scribes and the Pharisees. You would say, "Hey, we had a real dedication over there, we sort of recommitted our lives to religion and to God and where is the highest level of religion, we need to get there? So let's hang around with the scribes and the Pharisees. Let's do the fasts that they ascribe to. Let's do the alms giving that they ascribe to. Let's pray the prayers that they ascribe to. And let's really be serious because when the Messiah comes, we want Him to know that our repentance was real." So they don't make the transition to Jesus, but all of a sudden they start

hanging around with the people they perceive in their religious system are at the highest level.

Now at this time also, interestingly enough, John the Baptist is in prison. So he's not around to help his disciples. He's not around to be preaching everywhere saying, "Here's Christ, here's Christ, follow Him, follow Him." He's in prison and he's going to lose his head. So for all intents and purposes, his voice is stilled.

So these disciples of John wanting to be very, very faithful to their dedication that they made at their baptism with John wind up associating with these religionists. They blend in to the religion of the day and they do what would be the highest level of religious devotion. And by the way, long after this, go all the way to the nineteenth chapter of Acts, don't go there really cause we don't have time, but in your mind or write it down. The nineteenth chapter of Acts, first seven verses, way into the book of Acts you will run into disciples of John who never heard of Jesus...never heard of Him. That...that's years later. There was no media, there was no radio, or TV, print media. If you didn't hear about Jesus or meet Jesus, if you were off somewhere else, you didn't know, you didn't know. So there were disciples of John way into the nineteenth chapter of Acts and they gave them the gospel, do you remember? And they repented, they believed in Christ, they were baptized, they received the Holy Spirit.

So there were these people associated with John who in a desire to be fastidious in their religion associated themselves with the Pharisees. So they come as a group, kind of a mingled group and they ask the question. The disciples of John here they fast and offer their prayers and the disciples of John say, "Yeah." And the disciples of the Pharisees, they do the same. But Yours eat and drink, You're having a party here and this is, maybe, Monday, or Thursday.

Now just to make sure you understand what we're talking about, this was their own human invention. Do you know how many fasts in the Bible are commanded by God? One. There's only one commanded fast in the entire Old Testament, just one. It is Yom Kippur, Day of Atonement...that is the only fast commanded by God. Leviticus 16:29 and 31 commands people and it uses the phrase, "Humble your souls," or in the New King James, "Afflict your souls," from the Hebrew word anah which is commonly used to refrain from food. What was the Day of Atonement? It was a day when you took a hard look at...what?...your sin. When you did a deep inspection of your soul, when sacrifices for the whole nation were made, when the whole nation stopped its normal course of action and everybody did a heart search of their own sin...and that was God's required fast. You don't eat, you mourn, you grieve over your sin. There weren't any other required fasts. There were occasions in the Old Testament when the Jews did fast over grief in the book of Esther, chapter 4; in Isaiah 58 they're referred to; 1 Kings 21 they're referred to; Joel chapter 1 verses 13 and 14. There are fasts in the Old Testament associated, always associated with grief and mourning and the wrenching of the heart over some serious issue. That's...that is a proper fast. They're not required, they're just done voluntarily when...here's the key...someone is so overwrought, so sad, so heart sick, so concerned to

pray that they have no appetite.

I see this even today. I go into a hospital and I see a young couple and their baby is in surgery because the baby's hanging between life and death. The last thing you want to say to those people is, "Let's go to the cafeteria and eat," because it's liable to make them sick because you feel that trauma and that pain in your stomach. There...there is a need to just pray. If a person loses a loved one, a spouse and there's an overwhelming grief, that is the time to mourn, that is the time to weep the fast. If you have a prayer burden, you're praying for the salvation of someone and it literally dominates you to the degree that you have no appetite, that's the true and pure fast that is born of the heart...born of the heart. There's no merit in fasting. You're not going to get points with God if you don't eat, just because you don't want to eat so you can get points with God. It's when you have no appetite, it's gone because of the sadness and the turmoil of your heart. And there are occasions in the Old Testament when such fasts exist, when there is a grappling with something severe that takes away all desire to eat.

There were one-day fasts. There were three-day fasts. There were seven-day fasts. In Daniel 10 verses 2 and 3 there is a three-week fast. And there are several times in the Old Testament when you have a 40-day fast, right? Such as Exodus 34, Deuteronomy 9, I think 1 Kings 19 and even our Lord Jesus fasted for 40 days in the tremendous conflict over His soul with Satan.

But there's only one required. But what had happened in Judaism was they decided that fasting looked spiritual, so they invented routine fasts that had nothing to do with their hearts cause their hearts were rotten. Their hearts were stone, in the language of Ezekiel. I mean, on the outside they were white, on the inside they were full of dead-men's bones, Jesus said, they were hypocrites, they were despicable to God. They fasted only to be seen by men. And they determined that every Monday and every Thursday they would fast. And then every day they went through the ritual prayer, the ritual prayer. They had three major religious expressions of the Judaism of the time of Jesus and it still exists today among those that are orthodox. Prayer, alms and fasting, those were the three religious expressions and they did them publicly and they did them as ostentatiously as they could possibly be done in order to parade their supposed godliness before men.

Turn to Matthew 6 for just a minute. This will be a reminder because we've studied this in the past, but Jesus when He preached the Sermon on the Mount really lit a bomb in that message because He spoke to these religious leaders, these religious Jews and He said, "When you give alms, don't sound a trumpet before you." Can you imagine? You're going to give and so you have some guy blow a horn...Here, look over here, folks, ta-ta-ta-da, I'm giving. See, that was the kind of thing they did. They hypocrites do it in the synagogues and in the streets that they may be honored by men. Well they have their reward. What is it? They're honored by men, that's it.

And then in verse 5, "When you pray, don't be like the hypocrites, they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners in order to be seen by men." There they are out there on the corner going through all of their ritual prayers, saying all their little prayers, appearing spiritual. I've seen them do that even today among the orthodox. It's routine. I've seen it in many places in Israel.

And then down to verse 16, there was the third element of their ostentatious religious practice. "When you fast, don't put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance in order to be seen fasting by men." Monday, this is what they did, they got up, they put on their worse looking clothes, shabby, torn rag stuff and they didn't comb their hair. And they threw a few ashes around so they'd look pale and wan, like death warmed over. And they put a gloomy face and they roamed around, "I'm fasting." That's what they did. And they have their reward too, it's from men. In verse 17, "If you're going to fast, anoint your head." What does that mean? Put on some Brylcream, you know, comb your hair, or whatever you use. Comb your hair and wash your face so that you may not be seen fasting by men. In other words, if it's real then it's between you and God.

So there are the three things: prayer, alms, fasting. They had routine alms giving, routine prayers, routine fasting and they did it as ostentatiously as possible so people would see them. And Paul said they made an open display in the flesh, Galatians 6:12. But again, there was only one commanded fast. Any other fasting you did was from the heart because of grief, mourning because of sadness and concern. Very different. The Pharisees and their followers were engaged in really nothing more than hypocrisy. And the disciples of John the Baptist probably were pretty well intentioned, I would think, and they said, "Well, this is...this is the highest standard of religion so we'll kind of get into this." And so they're going through all of this and here is Jesus and His disciples at a party with the wretched people that none of these folks would ever associate with, just absolutely the antithesis of their religion. "Yours eat and drink, why are Yours so happy?" is the underlying thought.

Well that leads us to the second point, the interpretation. What's Jesus going to answer? How's He going to interpret their behavior? Verse 34, Jesus said to them, "You cannot make the attendants of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them, can you?" That is absolutely simple...simple. Attendants are the best friends who plan the wedding and Jesus says, "Look, you don't fast at a wedding, do you? A wedding is a celebration and when the bridegroom is there, you celebrate." Weddings often lasted seven days. Fasting is out of place. I suppose a father could say, "Well I am so...I am so upset that my daughter is marrying this guy that there will be no cake, there will be no refreshments, there will be no punch and there will be no food, we will be fasting." I suppose that could happen. But that's pretty bizarre. Matthew says, "You don't mourn and fast," linking those two which should be linked. Fasting was linked to sorrowful prayer and it was on the Day of Atonement, sorrow over sin. And Mark says, "As long as the bridegroom is with them, they cannot fast."

There were ancient rabbinical rules, by the way, forbidding people to fast at a wedding. Rejoice with those who rejoice. There's a time, says Ecclesiastes, to weep and a time to laugh. Fasting has its

appropriate time, a time of broken grieved hearts. But Jesus said, "You don't get it, do you? You don't get it. The bridegroom's here." Who's that? Himself. There's an old Jewish document called "Migalot Taonit???" called "The Scroll of Fasting." And it says that fasting is forbidden in all days devoted to happy times of celebration. The rabbis understood that. These people, these Pharisees, scribes, disciples of John, they were completely out of touch with what was happening. The Old Testament never refers to Messiah as a bridegroom, that is a New Testament term and here it's introduced. Later on Paul builds on that in his epistles and the book of Revelation builds on that, Christ the bridegroom takes His bride into the great bridal city, the New Jerusalem. So this is the first introduction of the Messiah as the bridegroom. But the analogy is very clear. He's saying, "You've been waiting and waiting," as people do, "waiting and waiting for the bridegroom to come and when he comes you inaugurate the celebration. Well, the bridegroom is here. You are out of touch with reality."

It would be completely ridiculous for Jesus' disciples to fast and mourn when the Messiah was there, the long-awaited Messiah. And again He just shows how completely out of touch they were with reality. It's particularly disturbing to me, too, that John's disciples had not transferred their faith to Christ to whom John appointed them. And I guess these guys were thinking, "You know, Jesus is hanging around sinners talking about forgiveness, but He's not doing the ritual stuff." That is just how far away from reality they were. That system, Judaism, bankrupt...bankrupt.

Jesus, by the way, did agree that His disciples didn't fast. He didn't, however, agree that they didn't pray. They didn't pray the daily routine prayers of the scribes and Pharisees and disciples of John and others, but they certainly prayed. So you don't find in any of the gospel accounts any statement that they didn't pray because prayer is just a way of life for God's people. But they didn't fast because they couldn't fast while the bridegroom was with them.

Can you imagine what it was like for them just being with the long-awaited Messiah day after day after day? What exhilaration, what joy, what fulfillment. They had been forgiven. They were the poor prisoners, blind and oppressed that had been released. Joy of all joys, they were in the presence of the Messiah of God. They were seeing His power, hearing His teaching. Fasting would be ridiculous.

Then Jesus adds in verse 35, "But the days will come and when the bridegroom is taken away from them, then they will fast in those days." What an interesting statement. The days will come. There's going to be a time in the future. And in that future time the wedding joy is going to end. Why? Because the bridegroom is taken from them, apairo, snatched. Wow! In the middle of the celebration, in the middle of the big celebration the bridegroom is going to be apairo, snatched. The word conveys the idea of a sudden violent snatching away. What does that refer to? The death of Christ. This is the first reference we have in Luke, really, by Jesus to His death. They're celebrating now, let them celebrate. That's appropriate. They're going to fast later on when the bridegroom's snatched out of the celebration.

You know, in the wedding imagery you would have thought..."Well, the bridegroom is there, the party's going on. At the end of the party he gets married, the celebration of life goes on." Oh, there's going to be a terrible interruption, a terrible interruption before the real marriage can take place. Right in the middle of the celebration He's snatched out, taken prisoner, executed on a cross and the disciples lose Him.

What do you think their attitude was? You know what it was. They were afraid, weren't they? Zachariah said, "Smite the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered." They panicked. I mean, that party came to a startling end. I...they could never have anticipated it. I mean, even Peter said, "Lord," when Jesus talked about His death, "no, no, no, no, don't let it ever be that way, it can't be that way. This can't end." But Isaiah prophesied, "By oppression and judgment He was taken away." Same idea, snatched away, cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of My people to whom the stroke was due." Then Jesus says they will fast.

I believe that's a prophecy and I believe that between the death of Christ and His reentry into their lives after His resurrection, they fasted. If ever there was a time of sadness, that would be it, wouldn't it? Wouldn't that be the saddest of all times? Let me show you something. Look at Luke 24 just briefly. I can't be dogmatic about that, it's just something that I...I feel Jesus prophesied it and I feel that it must have come to pass. Let me give you a glimpse that may indicate this. Luke 24, Jesus on the road to Emmaus, a couple of disciples going along with Him, and they don't know who He is. They think He's still dead. They think their dreams are shattered, their hopes are gone. Three days have passed and they don't have any news about a resurrection. Some people went to the tomb, verse 23, they didn't find His body. It's just a bunch of chaos and confusion and they're so sad. And so, He teaches them about the Messiah, verse 27. And then 28, "They approach the village where they were going," Emmaus. And He acted as if He would go farther, just...He's going to keep going, they're going to stop there and He's going to keep going. And they urged Him, saying, "Stay with us, for it is getting toward evening and the day's now nearly over." They still didn't know who He was. "And He went in to stay with them. And it came about that when He had reclined," "He took bread, blessed it and breaking it began giving it to them." Could that mean that they were fasting? He had to take the bread, He had to break it, He had to give it to them. Very reasonable. "Their eyes were opened and they recognized Him; He vanished out of their sight. They said to one another, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scripture to us?' They arose that very hour, returned to Jerusalem, found gathered together the eleven and those who were with them."

Now they're really excited. The fast has been broken. They ate. Jesus gave them bread to eat. "The Lord has really risen," verse 34, "He's appeared to Simon. They began to relate their experiences on the road and how He was recognized by them in the breaking of bread." It seems to be significant, doesn't it? This bread. "And while they were telling these things, He Himself stood in their midst." He

came right through the wall. "And they were startled and frightened and thought that they had seen a spirit. And He said to them, 'Why are you troubled and why do doubts arise in your hearts?'" They're somewhere in a house, in a room. And He says, "See My hands, My feet, it's I Myself, touch Me, see the spirit doesn't have flesh and bones as you see Me have." And He showed them His hands and feet. Then verse 41, "While they still couldn't believe it for joy and were marveling, He said to them, 'Have you anything here to...what?...to eat?'" I like this. "And they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish." That's not very much. They went somewhere in the house I guess that they were using and got a piece of broiled fish. "And He took it and ate it before them."

What was He saying to them? The fast is...what?...it's over. I'm back. The fast was over. You know something, folks? For us in that sense the fast is over, isn't it? Christ came out of the grave, didn't He? He ascended into heaven, He sent the Holy Spirit. And we now can say with the apostle Paul, "Rejoice always and again I say rejoice." We live in a state of constant joy. There are times in this temporal life when fast is appropriate for sadness and our sorrow. But the bridegroom is always with us. He's taken up residence in our hearts. The early church did fast on occasion, Acts 13; Acts 14. But that was because of earthly concerns. The bridegroom is always with us. We live in constant celebration, but there was that time when the sadness was crushing. Three years they had been with Jesus and now He's gone.

Here's what the Holy Spirit through Luke wants us to understand. Judaism at its most devout level, at its highest point is completely out of sync with the gospel totally. It doesn't recognize the Messiah. It doesn't recognize the bridegroom is here. It doesn't understand this is the time of immense joy. Christianity is unique. The gospel is unique. It is incompatible with any other religion, including Judaism. Whenever I read about the conference on Christians and Jews, I want to say I'd like to have a conference and just tell the Jews that their religion is bankrupt, they need Jesus Christ. And that's true of anybody in any religion. The gospel replaces it.

Now Jesus closes with the illustrations. And, back to Luke 5, just give me ten minutes because I want to finish this. You'll be glad you did. Verses 36 to 39, this is beautiful, graphic teaching. The illustrations. Jesus came to make a complete break with Judaism, complete break with the old. And here He makes it crystal clear. Verse 36, He's telling them a parable. Parabole can mean a figurative example, a metaphor, an analogy, a story, it's a very broad word. He gives them really three illustrations, three accounts to reflect a fuller understanding of the point that the gospel is exclusive.

He says this, "No one tears a piece from a new garment, puts it in an old garment, otherwise he will both tear the new and the piece from the new will not match the old." That's a simple point. If you had a new garment, you wouldn't tear a piece out of it because you would just ruin the new garment. And then if you took the piece out of the new and sewed it into the old, Matthew and Mark call it an unshrunk piece. As soon as you wash it, the new piece shrinks then it just rips the threads out and creates the hole all over again, and now you haven't been able to repair the old and you've ruined the

new. That's simple...simple illustration.

What is He saying? You can't patch the gospel into Judaism. Judaism is an old garment, you can't take a piece of the gospel and patch it in. It can't be done. You can't put the unshrunk new cloth into the old warn faded cloth. And if you do, Luke says it won't match anyway. The color's not right, the texture's not right, the pattern's not right, you can't do it. And again, this is the exclusivity of the gospel. It can't even be patched into Judaism. Judaism is a worn-out garment, useless to try to patch it with a piece of the gospel. Jesus has not come with a message of patching an old system, but replacing it...replacing it. The new internal gospel of repentance and forgiveness cannot be mixed with any tradition or self-righteous system of any kind, including Judaism.

Now listen to what I say right now, very carefully. The old garment here is not the Old Testament, it is not God's holy law which is eternal, which the gospel fulfills. We're talking about the religion of Judaism. Pieces of the gospel can't be stitched into that system or any other religious system. If you want to get that really clear in definitive terms, read Paul's letter to the Galatians. I wish I had time to go through it, that's what that is all about. By the way, in verses 37 and 38 the word "new" is used seven times. The gospel is new. It cannot be patched into the old. No mixture of the gospel in any other religion is possible at all.

Verse 37, He gives another illustration. "No one puts new wine into old wineskins, otherwise the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled out and the skins will be ruined. But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins."

Now just let me give you a very quick understanding of that. When they made wine, it was a fermenting process, obviously, in the making of wine. When they got the new wine out of the grapes and the grapes were crushed and the wine was yielded out in vats, they would pour those in a skin. Typically a goat's skin, they would sew the goat up, they would literally leave the skin intact when they skinned the animal, they would sew up the skin, the feet together, the front feet, the back feet, sew it up so you had this big sack, big pouch. The neck...cut the head off and the neck would be the spout and they would wrap the neck and tie it with leather thongs. They would fill it up with wine.

Now what happens is the wine ferments and when something ferments, gas is released and it expands...it expands...it expands. So it was critical to use new wineskins, new skins because they were subtle, they were soft and they would expand with that fermentation process. As the dregs went to the bottom they would be able to expand. Then the wine would be poured out into another skin and it would still continue some process of fermentation, some process of the dregs falling out. It could go from skin to skin to skin until it was pure and no dregs, or sour vinegar, left at the bottom. But particularly the new wine had to be first put in supple skin to allow for that expansion.

What He's saying here is, if you take this new wine and put it in old, cracked, brittle, stiff wineskins, the expansion process will burst the skins and it will be spilled out and those skins, of course, will be ruined. That's just another way of saying the very same thing. You cannot put the gospel into Judaism. You can't put it into any other religious system. You can't drop it in a sacramental Romish system. You can't drop it in the middle of a works/righteousness orthodox system. You can't drop it into liberalism. You can't drop it in neo-orthodoxy. You can't drop it into a cult. You can't drop it into anything. There is a dramatic difference in the gospel. It is new wine. It cannot be mixed with the old and it cannot be contained in the old by the old. Any placing of Christianity...you take the gospel and you put it in any work/righteousness system and you make it void. It's an old skin, it will crack and the gospel is lost. In fact, Galatians 5:4 Paul put it this way, "You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law. You're fallen from grace." It's not compatible, grace is not compatible with any works system. And again I say, the Christian gospel stands alone as the only way of salvation, unique and incompatible with any other religious system. The gospel of forgiveness by grace through faith alone in Christ alone can't be put into a dry and brittle skin of works/righteousness systems, including Judaism.

So my dear friend, don't think you can add Jesus to your religion. You can't. If you believe the gospel, it is the gospel that replaces your religion. The Pharisees and the scribes were the old skins, they were the old garment that couldn't contain the gospel.

Jesus then gave a third and final illustration, it's really sad. Verse 39, "And no one after drinking old wine wishes for new, or he says the old is good enough." That's just a simple little example. Take somebody whose been drinking the same kind of wine for years and years and years and you come along and say, "Ah, I've got a brand new kind here for you."

"Nah, no, I'll stick with my old favorite. I don't want to..."

"Well the new one promises...it's got new technique, new flavor..."

"No, no, I'm happy with my old."

Jesus looked at those Pharisees and said, "You've been drinking that old wine of Judaism so long, you have absolutely no interest in the gospel."

It's really true. People who have been in religions for a long time are very comfortable. They cultivate their taste for that tradition. They cultivate their taste for that experience. And Judaism had become mellowed and settled by centuries of experience and mounting, increasing tradition until it was so much a part of the fabric of their life they couldn't even see themselves in any other way. They were Pharisees and scribes to the death. They were self-satisfied. They had grown comfortable with their heresy, like old men who have been drinking a certain wine all their life and were not at all interested

in a new one no matter what it may have promised by way of delight and pleasure.

And I say to you what Jesus was saying is that those who have cultivated deeply the love of their traditional religion have no interest in the gospel. Haven't you found that to be so? So hard to reach those people. Give me a poor destitute pagan any time to a settled, comfortable religionist. The Judaism of Jesus' time was very satisfying old wine and they wanted nothing to do with the new. And eventually they saw to it that He was executed. How sad.

But that's where sinners are today as well. There's no mixing. And for those who aren't willing to come out of their false religions to the gospel, there is no hope...no hope. They aren't about to sell everything to buy the treasure in the field. They aren't about to sell everything to buy the pearl of great price. They certainly aren't going to take the cup of Luke 22:20, the cup of the New Covenant, and drink that when they're content with their damning system of false religion.

So what do we do? Do we tell them that's okay and put the gospel in as a patch? Do we tell them that's okay and dump some of the gospel in their old wineskin? No. Beloved, we have to preach that the gospel stands alone.

Our Father, we thank You for this powerful passage and its immense implication. May there be no soul here who having drunk for a long time the old is saying, "I am not interested in the new." Lord, deliver...deliver souls from that tragic rejection, by Your grace and mercy may You shatter their confidence in false religion and bring them to the pure delight of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We pray in His name. Amen.

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