

Jesus, Feasting and Fasting

Matthew 9:14-17

The calling of Matthew provided an opportunity for Jesus to explain the purpose of His ministry. He came to seek and save the lost (Matt. 9:13; 20:28; Luke 19:10). The Pharisees criticized Jesus because they did not understand this message (vv. 9-13). John's disciples also failed to understand Jesus' ministry and so they come to Him in sincerity asking about the pious practice of fasting. Matthew uses this occasion not just to teach us about food but about the person and the work of Jesus and what does it mean to be His disciple.

1. The _____ of Jesus should be _____ with a feast
Fasting was a time-honored tradition in Israel. The Pharisees fasted twice a week (Mondays and Thursdays). But unlike the Pharisees who fasted hypocritically (Matt. 6:16), John's disciples fasted sincerely. When asked why His disciples were not fasting, Jesus answered then saying, "It's inappropriate to fast when the bridegroom is present" God promised His church a bridegroom in the person of His Son, Jesus (Isa. 50:1ff; 62:5; Jer. 2:32; Matt. 25:1ff. 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:32; Rev. 19:7), and this is often since He is in their midst, that calls for celebration (cf. Hosea 2:16-20; John 3:29).

2. The _____ of Jesus is worth _____ for
Using the analogy of a wedding to speak about His ministry with Israel, Jesus says that His disciples will fast when He is taken away. Indeed, a few days later, Jesus would be apprehended, judged, condemned and crucified (John 16:16-22). Jesus is worth fasting for because of His work of redemption. Though He was taken away for a while, His death and resurrection has secured our salvation.

3. The _____ of Jesus calls for an _____ feast
Jesus points that fasting and feasting at the same time is not possible and He uses two illustrations to show His point (vv. 16,17). A new patch on an old garment does not well. It's incompatible and destructive (cf. Psalm 102: 25-28). Likewise with a new wine on an old wineskin (cf. Joel 3:18). Fasting and feasting do not go hand in hand. God's command to fast is only given in Lev. 16:29, on the Day of Atonement when sacrifices of the nation are given for the sins of the people. It's a fast expressing their mourning and sorrow over sin with the view to the coming judgment of God. But now with Jesus in their midst (the ultimate Lamb of God - John 1:29), comes the day of salvation (Matt. 9:13). The presence and the coming of Jesus make all the difference for our salvation and for our devotion and for our practice and joy.

Today, our fasting should be done with respect to the person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Our fasting should be done in the joy of knowing that He has accomplished our perfect salvation. We fast in humble petition for the grace that we need as we deal and battle with daily sin and temptation, knowing that in Him, we are victorious. And we fast with the expectation of hope that someday, we will be in the very presence of our bridegroom in glory in that place that he prepared for us called heaven, the Father's house. And that calls for the ultimate feast.