



## HOW CAN THE GUESTS OF THE BRIDEGROOM MOURN WHILE HE IS WITH THEM?

~ MATTHEW 9:15 ~

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**Then John's disciples came and asked him, "How is it that we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?" Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast. "No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. Neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved."**



This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

What can be more enjoyable than getting together with friends, free food, mostly free drinks, some good music and maybe a little bit of dancing? There has to be something there that just about everyone can like. And all of those things are found at a wedding. Summer is a common time of the year for weddings – kids are off of school, the weather is warmer in all parts of the country – it just provides a good time to have a celebration. I can think of a couple of my friends who are getting married this summer, and it takes me back to the day when I got married. It was a wonderful day, we were surrounded by wonderful people, and we had a wonderful time.

The whole idea of a wedding, like any party, is to celebrate something. At a wedding, we celebrate the bride and the groom starting their life together. At a birthday party, we remember the birth of an individual and what he or she has brought into our lives. These celebrations are usually fun, they are filled with rejoicing and happiness.

In this, the first week of our summer series "Jesus is Asking", we hear Jesus' first question. And he asks it using the example of a wedding banquet and he is the groom. He was making a point to everyone around him where joy is found. A wedding is a great example of a time to be joyous, a time to celebrate. He gave everyone the clue about FINDING JOY.

1. Where is it found?
2. What do we do with it?

(1)

Joy is certainly something everyone wants, something everyone is looking for. But the big question is where is it found? Is joy found in selfish things – like wealth, pleasure, taking care of your own family, or is joy found in serving others, saving the planet, etc.? Experts on the subject will probably

say that joy comes from within, when you are content and happy with yourself, you can be joyful. I'm sorry, but to me that just sounds like an easy way out that everyone can be happy if they just think hard enough about happy thoughts.

One thing we can be sure of is that if joy is out there, then not a lot of people have realized it, because there is still a lot that makes us not so joyful. Envy is just one of those things. We can see envy sprout its ugly head in our gospel for this morning from Matthew 9. **"Then John's disciples came and asked him, 'how is it that we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?'"** Doesn't that just sound like a bunch of whiny kids? "Why does he get to have dessert?" "Why do I have to clean my room?"

So what was it that set off John the Baptist's disciples? Jesus had recently finished eating at the home of one of his newly called disciples, Matthew. Matthew had celebrated with all his tax-collector friends, and Jesus joined them in their celebration. This took place on one of the two days a week that devout religious Jews fasted. It certainly seemed like Jesus was rubbing it in their faces that his disciples could eat, while the disciples of others were not able to.

But it was not that Jesus was against fasting. Fasting has a purpose and it can serve a person well. Jesus said in Matthew 6, **"But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen"** The original purpose of fasting was as a way to be sorry for one's sins and to reflect on God's judgment. That's why Jesus said not to worry about who saw you fast. But the Pharisees and others turned fasting into something different, they turned it into a show, a "holier-than-thou" activity, or as a way to get God to do something for them. But Jesus also knew there was a time to fast and a time to celebrate. He told John's disciples that fasting and sorrow were not necessary at this time, but rather feasting and joy.

The disciples of John and the Pharisees were looking for joy in all the wrong places. They were looking for joy in the things that they did. They were looking for joy in the selfish things of making themselves look good before other people or in the acquiring of wealth. They were looking for joy in trying to please God, one of these ways was through fasting. And yet all of this did not work, they still found themselves getting jealous at the "joy" of others.

Don't we sometimes look for joy in some of the same places John's disciples and the Pharisees? Just like the Pharisees it's easy to lose track of where joy is found. We say that we find joy in Jesus, but perhaps that is only one of the things we find joy in. I think something that a lot of people find joy in is rules. Especially inside the church, don't we like to judge people based on what they 'should' or 'should not' be doing, on what they 'should' or 'should not' be wearing. "People should give more money to charity or in their offerings" "People should come to church more often, then the world would be a better place."

I know that I have often sought joy in rules. The more rules we have, the better people would be, the better this world would be. I could be more efficient with more rules, and people wouldn't bug me as much if they followed my rules. I think we can all relate to that on some level. And I think we can find some sense of satisfaction in keeping the rules, doing what you're supposed to do. But can you really find joy, I mean, lasting joy in following rules?

If we are so caught up in rules and what we should and shouldn't do, then we should probably take a look at God's rules. I was just reading this last week in Matthew about Jesus' sermon on the mount, and you know what struck me? It was how much I have not kept God's rules. In that chapter Jesus goes into telling what God really expects out of us. Two phrases jumped out at me in that chapter, **"For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven."** And **"Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."**

God's law is plain and clear, and all we can do is shake our heads in despair. We do not find joy in God's law but despair! We have tried to adjust God's law to suit our own desires, picking which laws we want to follow and which we don't, but we can't do that. It would be as foolish as picking which laws of our country we want to follow and which we do not. But even for the fools who don't believe in God or his rules, the consequences of breaking God's law are all too evident in their lives. **"The wages of sin is death."** We think death is just a consequence of living, but it's not, it's a consequence of breaking God's law. Everyone who dies has broken God's rules, whether they know it or not, even little babies. And there is no joy in death!

Death has a trickle-down effect on our lives. Can we even find anything meaningful? The book of Ecclesiastes starts out with **"Meaningless, meaningless...everything is meaningless."** We can search for answers in the things of this world, we can search for answers in man-made religion, in how we can please an almighty creator, but whatever joy we find is only fleeting at best. It can be here today and gone tomorrow. Finding joy in the world is hopeless! To find joy, there must be an entire paradigm shift. Joy cannot come from this worldly cycle.

(2)

Now, in the Jewish culture and tradition, there was one exception to the fasting and mourning that was necessary at certain religious holidays. The exception was for a wedding. For the bridal party, the laws were relaxed. It was considered part of the bridal party's duty to gladden the bride and the bridegroom. It's no wonder then that Jesus uses the example of the bridal party when he asks his question to the disciples of John. **"How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them?"** Jesus was comparing himself to the bridegroom, and that he was the reason for his disciples to be joyful.

What is it that makes Jesus a person to rejoice over? Jesus has shifted the paradigm. He did what we could not do – he took all of the God's rules and kept them to a "T." Then the exchange took place – going to the cross to pay for all of my sins and your sins. And it was his resurrection three days later that assured us of his victory over sin, death, and the devil. It is this victory we rejoice in, his victory is our victory (similar to fans of a team which wins a championship). We have joy because of this victory. We have joy because this victory guarantees us everlasting life. And it is this joy that we have in Jesus that gives us fuel in our other endeavors.

Other people search for the source of joy in helping others, improving ourselves, trying to keep God's rules. But we know that this is not the source of joy, but only the fruits. As Christians, our joy comes only from Jesus, and this joy is then reflected in the things we do. We take joy in helping others in

need, we take joy in offering our time, treasures and talents to support our church, we take joy in ever improving ourselves, not because these activities provide joy, but they are the fruits of joy.

Jesus is the source of joy, many other “joyful” things are the fruits that stem from this joy. And that’s important to remember. It’s not that you can find joy in Jesus, and then find joy in other things – like marriage, or being a good neighbor. Jesus comes before the others. And that is what Jesus is talking about when he uses the two examples at the end of our gospel. Jesus said, **“No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment...neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins.”**

Joy in Jesus means joy in nothing else. And before you get on my case, listen to what I mean. If your source of joy is in Jesus, you cannot add anything to it like praying, fasting, doing penance or having a Pentecostal experience to make your faith, to make that joy genuine or real. Doing this would destroy both the joy and the “unshrunk” cloth that was added. Joy in Jesus also means not to put this joy into our preconceived notions of what joy is. Joy is not found in whatever we think makes us happy, or in just whatever we want to do. Joy is found in Jesus. If we try to make Jesus fit with our own content lifestyles, this doesn’t work either, both are ruined. Instead of conforming Christ to our lives, we must conform our lives to Christ, in whom true joy is found.

Searching for joy is something that many people are doing these days. Whether it be seeking fame and fortune, seeking happiness in a family, or seeking to please God by the way they live. All of these paths to joy lead to dead ends. As Christians we know where true and lasting joy is found, in Jesus. But even Christians need to be reminded of this joy, because of the sinful nature within. May the joy of Jesus pierce through timid hearts, comfort our sorrowful hearts and lift up our yearning hearts with joy that only comes from him. Amen.