

95-01-01Mark

On a beach in a cold place, Where I know I am free, Sitting alone by the light of grace, Jesus loved me like a stranger, Born free from the world around. Jesus gave me relief, From beneath his precious blood. Oh, great child, pray that never, May I ever sleep with thee, When I'm in heaven, there to find the way.

Find the way for me. How shall I turn away then? For the way that I was found, Is the way of the living King. Sleep for I was all alone.

God of grace and God of glory, All I need, all I have, From an ancient church and story, Bring me back to the place of home. Bring me back to the place of home, For the place beyond which I roam, For the place beyond which I roam. And all the world shall hear of my voice, So will I rise to the strength of grace, From whom heaven and earth have found us, We are born to make a praise.

For evermore shall we love, For evermore shall we love, That living God may save us, For the living God may save us. Say thou to me, And love me graciously, And our hearts will faithfully be, Bound with your Christ-like graces, In the flesh, Set free. In the flesh, Set free.

In the flesh, Set free. In the flesh, Set free. You may be seated.

You may be seated. An interesting part of the Gospel of Mark. We're in chapter 2. We have seen Jesus call a tax collector to be his full-time follower.

He's called Levi. This has raised some eyebrows in Israel because tax collectors and sinners were thought to be of no value to God. They were viewed in the social life of Israel as the lowest level, as not worth bothering with, something just slightly above a Samaritan perhaps.

And yet Jesus Christ has identified himself with this lower strata of civilization, of the society, by calling Levi or Matthew to be a full-time follower. And then he goes to Matthew's house and has all of Matthew's friends over, other tax collectors, other quote-unquote sinners. And you'll recall two weeks ago that we saw that this designation of sinners is in the minds of those who consider themselves to be outside that group.

If those people over there are the sinners, then I, by definition, am not. And Jesus said, those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. And this is in our own minds, isn't it? We have to recognize where we stand before the Lord.

If we think that we have no need, then the physician cannot minister to us. He did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. And we know that all have sinned.

Everyone is a sinner. And so when Jesus says, I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance, he has really come to call everyone, hasn't he? But these Pharisees had decided

that they didn't need a physician. They didn't need what Jesus had to offer.

And we have focused on that fundamental principle that we as human beings are faced with the issue of God. And that raises in our soul the issue of our need. And it's the first thing we have to recognize.

If we don't recognize our need, then we have no motivation to accept Jesus Christ as Savior. We have no motivation to pursue an understanding of God's plan after salvation if we don't believe that we have a need. And this is a very real trap that we as believers in Jesus Christ can fall into.

How long have we been in church now? For most of you, it's probably twice what it is for me. Some of us were saved as children and grew up in Sunday school and grew up in church. We've heard the Bible stories.

We can name the books of the Bible backward and forward. We can tell you how many chapters there are in Romans. We can tell you all of the different episodes in the life of Christ.

We can tell you the basic idea in Colossians or in Galatians or in 1 Corinthians. We know that Moses wrote the first five books. We have all of this knowledge, all of this exposure to Christianity and to the Word of God, don't we? We've been in church for years.

Fifty-two Sundays a year for fifty years perhaps. That's a lot of time. And we may have reached the point of thinking, well, what does church have to offer me that I haven't already seen dozens of times? What does this particular sermon or this particular teacher on the radio or this particular book have to offer me new? I've seen it all.

I've been around. I'm a believer, white-haired with age. I've been in Christ for decades.

And what happens if we start to lose that sense of need, that recognition that I need Thee every hour, O precious Lord? If that sense of need goes away, we will find ourselves, consciously or unconsciously, in this same camp with this same attitude. There are the sinners. There are the needy.

I need to go minister to them because they need the Gospel. They need the Word of God. And we may unconsciously overlook the fact that I need the Savior.

I need the Word of God to minister to my soul. None of us reaches the point of sinless perfection in this life, do we? And if we are not sinlessly perfect, then we still have a need, don't we? And the longer we look, the bigger our need seems to grow. When we start analyzing, not the overt sins.

Most of us can refrain from murder and refrain from adultery and refrain from stealing and lying and keep most of the Ten Commandments, keep most of the thou shalt's and the thou shalt not's. But what about when we start looking at our thought life? What about bitterness? What about

envy or jealousy? What about a grudge that we bear against another person? What about discouragement? What about worry? What about fear? A sense of uncertainty and disquietude about the future. What will happen to me? What will happen to my spouse? What will happen to my children? A sense of worry that goes beyond concern and becomes a fear that reflects a lack of trust in God and His provision.

What about those day-to-day tensions that come up in our marriage or with other people that we deal with where there's a flash of impatience, there's a flash of anger, there's a flash of bitterness, there's a flash of frustration that comes up in our soul? We have a need, don't we? Because as long as those things are present in us, we need more of what God has to offer in the way of resources. We need more in the way of strength. We need more in the way of that supernatural power that can overcome our own sinful nature.

And as long as those things are present and we recognize that need, we can come to the position and be healed. We can respond in repentance and have the Word of God and the Spirit of God enrich and strengthen us just as it has always done from the very beginning. And that is our purpose in life.

We are often told that our purpose in life is to evangelize or our purpose in life is to minister. The Bible never teaches that. The Bible teaches that our purpose is to reflect the glory of God.

Those things are included in reflecting God's glory, aren't they? What a glorious way of revealing the character of God, the compassion of God, in sharing the Gospel with someone who is seeking, someone who is ready, who recognizes their need, and we can speak the truth to them in love. It's a wonderful, glorious function, but that is not our purpose. That is a byproduct of fulfilling our purpose, which is to reflect the glory of God.

How many times a week can you share the Gospel? If you are circulating among a lot of unbelievers, you might even be able to get up to once a day. You might be able to average once a day sharing the Gospel. You might spend 15 or 20 minutes or an hour sharing the Gospel with someone, and that's wonderful.

Praise God that those opportunities have come up. But what about the other 14 or 15 waking hours of the day? What about those days when we don't have an opportunity to share the Gospel? Are we just in limbo? Are we on hold? Are we just waiting for the next opportunity? God claims that time for Himself. God claims our soul.

God claims our thought life, our verbal life, the things that we say. And we know from James what a flaming fire the tongue can be, how much damage it can do, how easy it is to wound one another, to undercut another person or especially another believer. And for God to come in and rehabilitate our thought life and rehabilitate our verbal life, as well as our control over the overt sins, is the place where His glory is reflected.

Jesus comes to those who recognize that need. We have that need every hour, not just sending up a quick prayer right before we share the Gospel. God claims all of us.

We have been bought with a price, and we are to glorify God every minute of every hour of every day. And what does that consist in? It's our thought life. So, we recognize the need for rehabilitation in our thinking, and we have also seen how that is done.

It isn't just a challenge to yield. It isn't a general exhortation to be holy for I am holy. How is it that we can glorify God in our thinking? How is it that our thinking has changed? All of our Colossians veterans should recall that our thinking is rehabilitated through faith.

The life of faith is what we are called to. By faith, the men of old received a good report. And by faith, the people of the present receive a good report.

To have faith, we have to have faith in something. We have to accurately interpret the Word of God and make those truths the object of our faith. We trust in it.

We act on it. It makes a difference in the way we operate. And if God says, be still, stand still, and watch my deliverance, as impatient as we may feel and as hyperactive as we may appear, it's our job to stand still.

If God says, vengeance is mine, I will repay, we have to trust that. We have to let go of grudges. We have to let go of the desire for getting even or of showing someone up.

Showing up the fact that they were wrong about us. We have to give up the idea of self-vindication, of proving to others that we are as good as we know ourselves to be. That we don't deserve the things that are said about us and so forth.

Jesus has come to people who recognize their need. Those are the people that He can minister to. We are those people if we recognize our need, no matter how long we have been believers.

Now He goes on in Mark 2, verse 18 to give us another episode hard on the heels of this and that theme and that idea flows into these next words of the Lord and helps us understand what He's saying here. In verse 18, the disciples of John and of the Pharisees were fasting. Then they, some people, whoever it may be, it's not necessarily these disciples.

There's not even a pronoun in this sentence. It just says, someone came up and asked the Lord. Said to Him, Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast? Jesus said to them, Can the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast.

But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them and then they will fast in those days. Now, we saw this past Wednesday how valuable it is to keep straight in our minds some simple principles of interpretation of the Bible. We reviewed those again this morning with

the junior high Sunday school class.

One of the things that we know is that Israel in the Old Testament represents a specific category of people. What category of people does the nation of Israel represent? Believers. The people of God.

Even though we know that in reality there were unbelievers in the nation, God's dealing with the nation of Israel reflects principles of God's dealing with believers, with His people. And that principle is so important when we come to interpret passages like Ezekiel 3 and Ezekiel 33 where a watchman is set up and a watchman, a messenger, is sent to the people of God. That restricts and narrows the application of those principles to believers.

Similarly, when we see this idea of the wedding, there are certain common principles. Anytime we see that figure in Scripture, we have some things to help us. Who is the groom at this wedding? Who is the bridegroom all through the New Testament? It's Jesus Christ.

Who is the bride? The church. Who are the friends of the bridegroom? Israel. Israel, the nation of Israel, the Old Testament saints are the friends of the bridegroom.

The church as the bride of Christ, and I grew up in a denomination that believes that every believer in every dispensation is a part of the church. Not so. One of these days we'll detail that study.

But we in this age, starting at Pentecost and ending at the rapture, are in a special category. We fulfill a specific function in God's plan. It does not make us better than Old Testament saints.

We are not holier. We are not higher. We are not somehow more valuable.

But we fulfill a different function in God's plan. Think about the Levites in the Old Testament. They were the priests.

They administered the sacrifices and did the teaching for Israel. Were the Levites somehow better in quality than other Israelites? They were not. But they were called to a specific function in God's plan.

And that's our situation in this age. We are the bride. Christ is the bridegroom.

The friends of the groom, the bridesmaids and so forth, the wise and foolish virgins who wait for the groom to come and marry the bride, that is Israel. Every time we see those parables, the wise and foolish virgins, the friends of the bridegroom and so forth, we're dealing with Israel. You may recall that John the Baptist even used this figure over in John 3 where in verse 29 he says, He who has the bride is the bridegroom.

But the friend of the bridegroom who stands and hears him rejoices greatly because of the

bridegroom's voice. Therefore, this joy of mine is fulfilled. John the Baptist pictures himself as the friend of the bridegroom.

From our introduction to Mark, we've seen the symbolic value that John the Baptist has. He represents that Old Testament economy. He represents the time of ritual observance.

He represents the Mosaic Law and those who serve the Lord under it. And so the friends of the bridegroom represent Old Testament saints, Israel. Now right now when Jesus is speaking, what dispensation are we in? What age are we in? Old Testament.

Jesus Christ and the disciples are living in the age of Israel. The Day of Pentecost does not happen. The Holy Spirit is not yet given.

Christ is not yet glorified. This is the Old Testament economy. This is why the Mosaic Law is still in effect.

This is why Jesus and His disciples still observe the feasts like the Feast of Passover. This is why Jesus teaches in the synagogue on the Sabbath, on Saturday instead of meeting in a church on Sunday. We're in the age of Israel.

And Jesus' teaching here specifically is to Israel all through His earthly ministry. His teaching was to Israel. And we discern the principles that are in that teaching, extract them out, and make application of them to ourselves, but we have to remember who He's talking to.

So now, the disciples of John and of the Pharisees are fasting. Why do the disciples of John and the Pharisees fast and your disciples do not? Jesus answers with this bridegroom figure. So we have two things to discuss here.

One is the figure of the bride and the bridegroom and the friends of the groom. The other is fasting. And I think we'll start with the concept of the bride and the bridegroom.

The wedding has not yet taken place, but the groom has arrived. And the friends of the groom are there. And the occasion is one of rejoicing.

There's been anticipation of this event and now here is the groom. He has arrived. This is not the time to mourn.

And fasting, as we will see shortly, was designed to be a symbol of mourning. So the first thing we see here is that we have to know the times. The friends of the bridegroom know that the groom has arrived.

They know where they are in the sequence of events. They're not at the first anniversary or the tenth anniversary of the marriage. They are at the point of anticipating that marriage.

They know where they are. They know the groom has arrived and they know that this is a time of

celebration. And so they're in a celebratory mood.

Last night, most of the world got into a celebratory mood as they watched the big apple descend and so forth and ring in the new year. There's great festivity and party. That is not an occasion that calls for sackcloth and ashes, is it? People don't put away their party hats and get on a long face and watch the clock slowly tip toward midnight and then say, I'm not eating anything for a whole day.

I'm not going to have another meal. It's the new year. And I'm pretty mournful and I'm just not going to eat, not going to party, not going to celebrate.

It's just completely incongruous, isn't it? It's a time of celebration. And there's a principle there for us. We have to know the time.

There is a time for everything and a season for every purpose under the sun. There is a time for mourning. There is a time to reflect and to examine oneself.

And there is a time to celebrate. The disciples of Jesus Christ have recognized who He is through the teaching of John the Baptist. Do you recall? How did Peter and Andrew and James and John and Philip come to Jesus Christ as disciples? How did they identify Him? They were disciples of John the Baptist.

We saw from the book of John they had been following John the Baptist. And when John said, Behold the Lamb of God, this is the one we've been waiting for. Those men were on hand.

They knew the times. They knew it was time for Messiah. They recognized God's messenger.

They listened to the message and they responded. And now they're following Jesus Christ. Does it strike you at all that in this verse it says the disciples of John the Baptist? What was John's mission in life? To point to Christ.

To identify Jesus Christ. He's the forerunner. I must diminish.

He must increase. I must decrease. And yet here Jesus has been ministering now for over a year and we have disciples of John.

What happened? Followers of John the Baptist did not listen to John's message. There are still followers. John is in prison now, right? John has been in prison.

His ministry is over with. And yet there are disciples of John as a group who haven't become disciples of Christ. Why do we even have this group? There has been some sort of a failure, hasn't there? The disciples of John didn't get the message.

They listened to John, but they didn't identify Jesus Christ. We shouldn't even be talking about

this group. There shouldn't be a group called disciples of John.

If John had had his wish, all of his followers would have become followers of Christ. So, we see that there are people that have not identified the time. They haven't listened to the message and they haven't responded to the presence of Jesus Christ among them.

And so, they are still looking for something that has already come. They're still looking for the bridegroom and the bridegroom is here. John's message was one of anticipation.

There is one coming after me, mightier than I, whose shoe I'm not worthy to unbuckle. I baptize you with water. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

That has come. Jesus is here. He's actively ministering.

And these disciples of John haven't gotten the message. They haven't discerned the time. They haven't recognized that the bridegroom is here.

So, naturally, if they are still waiting, if they are still anticipating, if they are still thinking about the problem in Israel that will be solved by the Messiah, they're going to fast. So, we see here something that applies to us as well. Are we looking at life from a standpoint of having recognized our need and having gone to God and sought that solution and yet the solution is right among us and we haven't identified it? We have problems.

We pray prayers. We recognize difficulties in our life, difficulties in the lives of others that are around us. And we know that God is the answer.

We go to God and we pray. We meditate on these things. We worry over them.

We fret about them. And we think, oh, that God would solve this problem. Have we done like the disciples of John and missed the fact that the solution is here? It's among us.

It's with us. And we haven't recognized it. We're continuing to fast at a time when we should be rejoicing.

It's something to think about, particularly as we embark on a new year. As we review the year that has gone by, sometimes we can see that God had made provision all along and it took us too long to recognize it. It took us too long to see that before we called, God had answered.

The answer was there before us and we missed it. Now secondly, let's look at this idea of fasting. This passage, many of you have been through this before.

You know the standard interpretation of this. We go down. Jesus says the friends of the bridegroom don't fast while He is with them.

When He's taken away, they will fast. Then He talks about sewing the patch on the garment. He

says in verse 21, No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment or else the new piece pulls away from the old and the tear is made worse.

And no one puts new wine into old wineskins or else the new wine bursts the wineskins, the wine is spilled, the wineskins are ruined. New wine must be put in new wineskins. All of these things tie together.

Jesus gives these illustrations as a response to the question, Why do your disciples not fast? Now if you've heard this passage commented upon as I have, what do we generally see the old garment as being? The age of the law, the Mosaic law, the rituals and so forth. Jesus has come to usher in the age of grace. That's the new cloth.

The old wineskins are the old system, the old covenant, the Mosaic law. And here in the new, Jesus says, I can't work through the old covenant, so we're going to set it aside. We'll have new wine in new wineskins.

There is a difficulty with that, at least for me there's a difficulty with that. Would you want to stand before God and say, Well, you know Lord, I see your Ten Commandments, I see all the words that You gave to Moses, and to me those are like a raggedy old garment. It has a big hole in it, and it needs to be patched.

And we can't just patch it, because a new patch won't even fix it. It just has to be done away with. What does the Bible say about the Mosaic law? What does it say in Romans chapter 14? What does it say all through the book of Romans? The law was a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ.

We know that the law is good. Jesus did not come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it. So it will not work to say that these old wineskins and this old garment that are suggested by the idea of fasting constitute the Mosaic law.

Furthermore, let's look at fasting. Where in the law does it say to fast? Where in the Mosaic law does it specify, My people Israel on such and such a day shall fast. Or when they feel such and such a way, they shall fast.

I will save you a lot of research, it's not in there. There is no provision anywhere in the Mosaic law for fasting. The closest that you can come is in the observance of the Day of Atonement, which was a once a year ritual.

It's what we call Yom Kippur today, or what the Hebrew Israelites call Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the day when the high priest would go in and sprinkle blood on the mercy seat and the Holy of Holies. But even there, it does not specifically say to fast. Turn with me to Leviticus chapter 23.

Let's find out about this fasting. When we understand fasting, we will understand these illustrations, we will understand the Lord's teaching in this passage. Leviticus chapter 23, starting

in verse 26.

This is the prescription of God for the Day of Atonement. The Lord spoke to Moses saying also the tenth day of the seventh month shall be the Day of Atonement. It shall be a holy convocation for you.

You shall afflict your souls and offer an offering made by fire to the Lord. You shall do no work on that same day, for it is the Day of Atonement to make atonement for you before the Lord your God. For any person who is not afflicted in soul on that day shall be cut off from his people.

And any person who does any work on that same day, that person I will destroy from among the people. If you were here Wednesday night, we talked a little bit about that discipline from God on His people in connection with Ezekiel 3 and Ezekiel 33. God will destroy His own people in a discipline mode for disobedience.

You shall do no manner of work. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings. It shall be to you a Sabbath of solemn rest.

You shall afflict your souls on the ninth day of the month at evening. From evening to evening, you shall celebrate your Sabbath. Now that phrase, afflict your souls, is what suggests a fast.

Suggests putting everything else aside and concentrating on one's thought life. Why do I do what I do? What is my relationship to God? What is the motivation for my sacrifices and my offerings? Am I in fact being obedient to the commandment of the Lord? Once a year on the Day of Atonement, the day that represented the work of Christ on the cross in paying for the sins of the whole world. The application of that blood to cover sin.

That was the day to stop and reflect. That's what we will do a little bit later this morning when we participate in the Lord's table. We stop and reflect.

We analyze our souls. We think about the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. We think about His sacrifice and the purpose for which He saved us.

And has His sacrifice for us been beneficial? Has it made a difference? Do we live in a way that reflects His glory and accomplishes the purpose for which He made that sacrifice? This is as close as you will get in the Mosaic Law to fasting. So why did this fasting issue come up? Well, it began when Israel went out under God's discipline and went into captivity. The northern kingdom went into the Assyrian captivity.

The southern kingdom of Judah many years later went out under Nebuchadnezzar in the Babylonian captivity. And they were captives and they mourned over the fact that Jerusalem had been destroyed. And ever afterward, in the fifth and the seventh months of the year, they proclaimed a fast.

And they would fast and mourn over Jerusalem. Turn with me to Zechariah 7. We like to wrinkle up the pages in some of these books we don't get to very often. Zechariah 7. Last book but one in the Old Testament.

Zechariah Malachi. Zechariah 7, beginning in verse 1. We have a situation here where this fifth and seventh month's fast has been called into question. The fourth year of King Darius, it came to pass that the Word of the Lord came to Zechariah on the fourth day of the ninth month, Kislev, when the people sent Cherezer with Regem-Melech and his men to the house of God to pray before the Lord.

And look at verse 3. These men have come down to Jerusalem from Bethel to ask the priests a question. They've been observing this fast in the fifth month in commemoration of the destruction of Jerusalem. And they say, should we continue this fast or not? So in verse 3, they asked the priests who were in the house of the Lord of Hosts, and the prophets saying, should I weep in the fifth month and fast as I have done for so many years? This was in commemoration of the destruction of Jerusalem.

It was a fast that they invented. It's not a part of God's law. Not a part of God's Word.

And really, this is kind of a question that should never have arisen, isn't it? Here is a man-made tradition. And they're in an argument now. Should we continue this man-made tradition or not? How long should I have to keep this up, in other words? And in reality, it's not even an issue.

And God points this out. The Word of the Lord came to Zechariah in verse 5. Say to all the people of the land and to the priests, when you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months during those 70 years, did you really fast for me? And then he repeats that. For me.

Because that's really the issue. Why do we do what we do? And this fifth month and seventh month fast, was it done for God? Why was it really done? When you eat and when you drink, do you not eat and drink for yourselves? Verse 7, should you not have obeyed the words which the Lord proclaimed through the former prophets, when Jerusalem and the cities around it were inhabited and prosperous, and the south and lowlands were inhabited? Here is a fast that the people of Israel instituted a commemoration of the destruction of Jerusalem, which is a commemoration of their disgrace. It would be like my daughter Elizabeth having every month, on the fifth day of the month, commemorating some spanking that she got, some big dose of discipline that she got for extreme disobedience.

Maybe she not only got a spanking, but she lost some privilege in the house on the fifth day of the month. And so from then on, on the fifth day of the month, she holds a commemorative anniversary to remember this disgraceful day. God's saying, why are you worried about commemorating the fast which reminds you of My discipline on you when you fail to disobey? He said, I don't want you to remember the discipline, I want you to remember to obey.

Get back before the discipline. Learn the lesson that the discipline was supposed to teach. He says, remember the former prophets.

Now, who are the former prophets? Zechariah is writing in about the 6th century B.C. Isaiah wrote in about the 8th century B.C. Isaiah is one of these former prophets. And you may recall Isaiah 1 is a resounding rebuke of Israel for just going through the motions in their service to God. Isaiah 1, verse 10, Hear the word of the Lord.

Give ear to the law of our God, you rulers of Sodom, you people of Gomorrah. And he's talking to Israel. He's calling them Sodomites and Gomorrahites.

To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to me? says the Lord. I have had enough of burnt offerings. Now, this was a part of the law.

Burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle. And God says, I've had enough. I do not delight in the blood of bulls or of lambs or goats.

When you come to appear before me, who has required this from your hand to trample my courts? Bring no more futile sacrifices, incenses and abomination to me. The new moons, the Sabbaths, the calling of your assemblies, I cannot endure iniquity in the sacred meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts, my soul hates.

They are a trouble to me. I am weary of bearing them, God says to Israel. And these are their religious observances.

These are the things that God commanded. And he says, You're making me sick. When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you.

Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves.

Make yourselves clean. Put away the evil of your doings from before my eyes. Cease to do evil.

Learn to do good. Seek justice. Rebuke the oppressor.

Defend the fatherless. Plead for the widow. This is what God was looking for.

Something on the inside, something in the heart that would be reflected in obedience to these rituals and these sacrificial requirements. But the sacrifices without the attitude of heart made God sick. And God said, Stop, I'm tired of it.

It's meaningless. It doesn't reflect what I'm looking for in your soul. He says, Get back and cleanse yourself and your soul.

Don't we have this same situation in Jesus' day with the Pharisees? Having created all of these

fast days, the Pharisees fasted twice a week. Monday and Thursday of every week was a fast day for the Pharisees. Two times a week they fasted.

Fasting wasn't even a part of the law. But they not only considered it a mark of righteousness on their behalf, but they looked at others who did not fast and said, You're not righteous. You're not holy.

You're not a good man of God or woman of God because you don't observe my idea of what righteousness is. And we fall in danger of doing this today. We can take a right thing and make it a wrong thing.

We can take the sacrifices of God and the feast days of God and abuse them to the point that God says, Don't even try to observe these anymore. You're making me sick. Taking something that is supposed to be a reflection of what's on the inside and making it a religion, making it a ritual that is empty and without a reflection of reality is the principle here.

This fasting that the Jews did was meaningless. It did not reflect a genuine contrition toward God. It wasn't a part of obedience to God.

It was a man-made righteousness. And that's what these wineskins represent. That's what this old garment represents.

How many times in Scripture we've seen how Israel is a symbol of the people of God, a symbol of believers. God's dealing with Israel is God's dealing with believers. We've seen that the bride is the church and the bridegroom is Christ through all of these figures.

Here's another consistent figure in Scripture. Think about the garment. How many times have we seen the garment in Scripture? Think about James 5.2. Think about Revelation 3. Recall when he says, there are some there in Sardis who have not soiled their garments.

He says, those who are faithful will be given a white garment. They will walk with me in the garment of righteousness. And it's not the righteousness that comes at salvation.

It's the righteousness that's produced in our lives after salvation. That garment of righteousness that we wear over the garment that God gives us as a result of salvation, that garment of white, is the deeds that we do after salvation, the thoughts that we think after salvation. This old garment that is rent and torn is a human system of righteousness.

It's a human effort to look good, to feel good, to judge oneself righteous. That's the old garment. And you can't just patch an old garment, can you? If you take just a portion of the truth and try to patch it on there, you wind up with something even worse.

This is what the disciples of John did. And that's why this is in this passage. Why are the disciples of John mentioned? They had started out with the old system, the old system of ritual, the old

system of fasting and so forth.

John came and gave them a new message. Repent, the kingdom is at hand. They put that new patch on their old garment.

They didn't shuck away the old garment and accept the new garment of Jesus Christ, the new garment of faith toward God, of living in the light of the teaching of truth. They tried to take the old and just rehabilitate it. So they're midway.

They're still in with the Pharisees. They're fasting like the Pharisees. They're not following Jesus Christ.

They haven't accepted Him as their Messiah. They put a patch on their old garment of human righteousness and it's just making matters worse because it will tear that old garment and show it up for what it is, cloth that is not flexible, that is not strong anymore. That new patch just shows you the weakness in the old, doesn't it? We can't just take bits and pieces of the Word of God and patch it into our lives and continue with those things that God wants to eradicate.

This is what Israel tried to do. There was nothing wrong with the Mosaic Law. There was nothing wrong with that economy of God's system.

The greatest believers in history lived under the Old Testament economy. Moses, David, Samuel, the prophets, Abraham. There was nothing wrong with that system.

What became wrong is when people tried to create their own righteousness. Do you remember Isaiah 64? We are all as an unclean thing and all our righteousnesses are as what? Filthy rags. Our righteousnesses are the filthy rags.

Our righteousnesses are that old garment that is good for nothing. It's torn. It's soiled.

It does not qualify us for the presence of God. We need an entirely new garment. We can't just patch the old.

The truth that Jesus Christ is teaching, His followers are learning. His disciples are following Him because they've caught that truth. They're wearing the new garment.

So this is the call that we have to be new wineskins, to put on that new garment. I have been in that situation so many times. Having two little girls that recognize their own need wherever they may be.

We have to recognize our need for that new garment. We have to recognize what God is trying to tell us here. We can't take religiosity, we can't take tradition and patch it and make it work.

We need an entirely new garment. This outward service without inner transformation is a waste of time. God says, I'm sick of it.

Don't evangelize. Don't minister. Don't give.

Don't pray. If your heart is not right before the Lord, you're wasting your time. You're wasting your time.

We waste our time if it doesn't start with transformation on the inside. We have to have that new, clean garment. We have to be a new wineskin filled with new wine.

We can't mix human effort, human ideas of righteousness with God's righteousness. It just won't work. That's the message that Jesus gives.

He points out the heart of this problem with the fasting, doesn't he? The question is, how come your disciples don't fast? He says, because we're not trying to wear the old garment. We're not even trying to patch it like John's disciples. We're putting on that new garment.

These men follow me because they hear the Word of Truth that Jesus was teaching them. They're putting on that new garment. And that's our call to look at ourselves.

We'll look at ourselves here in a few minutes as we think about the work of Christ. Why did Christ die on the cross? Why did He cleanse us with His blood? To be transformed on the inside. To be changed.

To put that entirely new garment on. We can take a good thing and make it bad. We can take evangelism and make it bad.

If we think that that's our purpose in life, we might as well be an Israelite saying my purpose is to sacrifice. My purpose is to fast. Those things are supposed to be an expression of something more central, something more fundamental, which is the life of God on the inside of us.

The glory of God shining on the inside of us. These are wonderful things. The Mosaic law was good and right and holy.

Those sacrifices were designed to be a reflection and a teaching tool of all of the wonderful truths about God. And yet they became abused when they were flipped topsy-turvy and made an empty, meaningless, self-righteous act. We can take service to God.

We can take things that the church considers right and good and make them an empty, self-righteous act. We can make evangelism into self-righteousness. We can make giving into self-righteousness.

We can make prayer and service into self-righteousness if we're not careful to look on the inside, recognize our need, and then seize the solution to that need. And we know what that is. It's the life of faith.

It is motivated by hope for the future, knowing that we have a face-to-face meeting with God coming up in the very near future, and knowing that the environment of love, of compassion, of self-sacrifice that Jesus exemplified can be the environment of our lives. It can be reflected in our thoughts and our actions every single day. Let's close now in a word of prayer.