



The King's Ransom

Matthew 20:28

Text
Matthew 9:9-17

Topic
Matthew throws a feast for Jesus and while others are critical of his guests, The Lord defends their celebrating salvation

Title
"Life in the Feast Lane"

Introduction

The headline read, "With this onion ring, I thee wed."

A couple in England held their wedding reception at the local McDonalds where they had first met. The groom had a chicken sandwich with a strawberry milkshake while the bride went for the McNuggets and a Coke.

Total cost for them and their thirty-three guests was \$245.00.

We'll be looking at a feast in our text. Matthew gets called away from his career as a tax collector to follow The Lord and he throws Jesus a feast. Those who fancy themselves more religious, more spiritual, complain:

1. The first complaint is about the guest list. All of those around the table are sinners, notorious sinners by occupation and character, who the more religious would exclude from the feast.
2. The second complaint is about the feast itself as the critics argue that fasting is more spiritual.

Jesus explains to them, and to us, that a relationship with Him is more like a feast than a fast - more like a wedding feast, in fact.

Are you feasting with Jesus? I'll explore that question, organizing my thoughts around two points: #1 Your Life Without Jesus Is A Farce; Come To The Feast, and #2 Your Life With Jesus Is A Feast; Don't Succumb To The Fast.

#1 Your Life Without Jesus Is A Farce; Come To The Feast

(v9-13)

Brian Sumner is a world famous skater that lived an angry, empty life. He wanted to kill himself and he was out to prove that God did not exist.

He said of himself, "While making money, while traveling the world, while living the so called dream with skateboards and gear with your name on I had no clue about anything really. The thing that mattered most [my marriage and family] had failed, and I was frustrated."

Sumner came to Christ and now testifies of God's grace in saving him.

Testimonies abound of the emptiness of life despite worldly wealth, success and fame. I'm calling life without Jesus a farce in the sense that you are seeking to fill a longing, to satisfy a deep spiritual hunger with things that are all insufficient in the end. What you are seeking is to fill is the eternity God has placed in your heart - and that requires a personal relationship with Him.

- King Solomon called it vanity as he searched for meaning outside of a relationship with God.
- The apostle Paul called his life and accomplishments prior to meeting Jesus a pile of garbage.

Perhaps Rob Evans put it best. You probably know him better by his stage name, The Donut Man. His signature song goes like this:

*Life without Jesus is like a donut... Like a donut... Like a donut;
Life without Jesus is like a donut... There's a hole in the middle of
your heart.*

Matthew's life was a farce, it was vanity, a pile of garbage, until the hole in the middle of his heart was filled by Jesus. This passage is his testimony and its immediate aftermath.

Mat 9:9 As Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, "Follow Me." So he arose and followed Him.

Tax collectors were even more despised in the first century than they are today. For one thing, they were Jews in the employ of the Roman government, and thus considered traitors.

Besides that, tax collectors worked on the Sabbath and had close associations with Gentiles - rendering them defiled law breakers in the eyes of their countrymen.

The tax business was a franchise and tax collectors made their profit by exacting as much tax as they could beyond what Rome required.

In Capernaum Matthew would probably have set up a booth, not unlike a modern toll booth, either along the main drag or at the port. Posted there he and his associates would tax the goods being imported and exported.

It's safe to assume Matthew already knew who Jesus was. But that takes away nothing from his immediate obedience to The Lord. He got up, not just from his job, but from his entire life, and joined the Jesus followers. Nothing would ever be the same for Matthew.

Many of us had a crisis experience like that with Jesus. We heard the Gospel and responded to it. Our sins were forgiven; our heavenly account was filled with the righteousness of Jesus; God the Holy Spirit came to live within us. Our lives were transformed in a moment as we were transferred from darkness to light, from death to eternal life.

Mat 9:10 Now it happened, as Jesus sat at the table in the house, that behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples.

From the Gospel's of Mark and Luke we learn that this was, in fact, Matthew's house. Luke describes it as "a great feast," indicating what we already know about Matthew as a tax collector - that he was wealthy.

We don't know if this feast was thrown that same day or some time afterwards. It may well be that there was a constant feast at Matthew's house. It's not unusual for the rich to have guests constantly in their home partying. What else do they have to do but divert themselves from the aching in their hearts that there must be more to life?

Matthew's guests were fellow tax collectors and "sinners." We are all sinners; the use of the word in this verse means the guests were considered by those who seemed to be spiritual to be sinners who were outside of the scope of God's concern.

We ought never to think of anyone as too far gone, or too great a sinner, to be affected by God's saving grace. And, simultaneously, we must fight the natural tendency to think of ourselves as more spiritual than other sinners.

Mat 9:11 And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to His disciples, "Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

This feast was going on in a courtyard that could be seen by bystanders. Think of it like the food court at the mall - only with decent food.

The accusation was that if Jesus really were a "teacher" sent from God, He would know better than to associate with such people.

We are to be separate from the world and pursue holiness. But separation is not isolation. Just be sure that, among sinners, your holiness is contagious rather than you being stumbled by sin.

Mat 9:12 When Jesus heard that, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.

Besides being a great mission statement, this was a dig at the Pharisees. They were the spiritual Ph.D.'s of their day - the doctors of religion - but refused to be of any help to those in need. They instead put greater burdens on people, then carefully but critically kept their distance.

They were like plastic surgeons in Beverly Hills when the world needed triage doctors in field hospitals.

Mat 9:13 But go and learn what this means: 'I DESIRE MERCY AND NOT SACRIFICE.' For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

Zing! "Go and learn what this means" was an expression teachers used to correct their students when they misunderstood or misinterpreted Scripture. These experts were being directed to Hosea 6:6, to study it for its true meaning - which they had obviously not grasped.

Further, by directing them to Hosea Jesus was putting them in the same category as the apostates Hosea was rebuking in his prophecy.

Under the Jewish law - the Law of Moses - God did require sacrifice. But sacrifices laid on the altar were no substitute for godly behavior. In any dispensation God desires heart righteousness and not mere religious ritual.

Go ahead, Pharisees, and make you sacrifices, follow your rituals - but never to the exclusion of things like mercy which expresses itself in compassion, empathy, and help for sinners.

The "righteous" in verse thirteen refers to those, like the Pharisees, who believed themselves to be right with God on account of their keeping of both required sacrifices and traditional rituals they had added to the Scriptures in order to appear even more spiritual.

One of the great evangelistic texts of the New Testament is Revelation 3:20, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me."

The feast Matthew held for Jesus is a physical representation of that spiritual truth. Jesus had called to Matthew - inviting him to salvation. Matthew responded to the gracious invitation, was saved, and found himself feasting with The Lord.

The feast extended to others as Matthew was transformed and desired to give testimony of the love of God in Jesus forgiving his sins and giving his life purpose and meaning. Someone pointed out that the unsaved are more likely to come to supper than a sermon.

Matthew's life had been a farce... it had been vanity... it was garbage. He was wealthy, he was worldly; the party never stopped. But he lived in a donut hole - having eternity in his heart that could only be filled in a relationship with God.

The spiritual doctors of his generation were all plastic surgeons who made themselves look better on the outside. They had nothing to offer Matthew except condemnation.

Jesus knocked, Matthew opened, and his heart was satisfied. Life had become the feast God intended it to be all along.

#2 Your Life With Jesus Is A Feast; Don't Succumb To The Fast

(v14-17)

Just when you are enjoying your relationship with The Lord, someone will come along and suggest that the honeymoon is over. It's time to grow-up and get spiritual by adding certain religious traditions or rituals to your walk with Jesus. It's time to push away from the table and get down to more serious business.

In Matthew's case that push came from the disciples of John the Baptist.

Mat 9:14 Then the disciples of John came to Him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Your disciples do not fast?"

In the Law of Moses the Jews were commanded to fast once a year, on the Day of Atonement. There were other times in their history when a fast was called, usually times of extreme spiritual stress when they were seeking the presence of God to deliver them from some danger.

By the first century, those who considered themselves more spiritual had adopted a twice-weekly fasting. Some who fasted made a big show of it - letting others know they were fasting in order to seem more spiritual.

I want to think that the disciples of John were sincere in their question. They had adopted the modern tradition, as had the Pharisees, but with more honest motives.

At any rate, they were troubled that Jesus and His disciples "[did] not fast." Now we know that both Jesus and His disciples did fast.

- The Lord fasted forty days in the wilderness.
- He would instruct His disciples that certain demons could only be exorcised "by prayer and fasting."

What they did not do is observe the ritual of twice-weekly fasting. It made them seem less spiritual in the eyes of the religious elite.

We seem obsessed with figuring out who is more spiritual by using external measurements. Nothing you see externally can really reveal what is in the heart. As is said in churches all the time, you can go through the motions without having the emotions.

Mat 9:15 And Jesus said to them, "Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast."

I love it that Jesus met people right where they were at. John the Baptist had announced to the world, including his disciples, that Jesus Christ was like a Bridegroom and that he (John) was merely a friend of the Bridegroom. Jesus used John's own illustration to answer the disciples - a show of respect for John, but one that drew the logical conclusion of his teaching.

As long as Jesus was among them, they were like a wedding party and ought to be feasting - not fasting. I mean, who goes to a wedding reception and fasts?

The Bridegroom illustration is pretty powerful in that the Jews would have understood Jesus to be pointing to a verse in Isaiah:

Isa 61:10 I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, My soul shall be joyful in my God; For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, As a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

It's a passage that is describing the coming Jewish Messiah by comparing Him to a Bridegroom - and Jesus was claiming to be the Bridegroom.

Something else to notice is that normally fasting is a discipline intended to in some way renew the sense of God's presence among us. By insisting that there was no real need for ritual fasting while He was on the earth Jesus was indicating that He was, in fact, God in human flesh.

Jesus anticipated that the Jews would reject His offer of the kingdom and that He would, for a time, "be taken away from them."

We live in that time, so "then [we] will fast" means fasting endures as a spiritual discipline. We do see the disciples fasting in the Book of Acts on a few occasions.

So, then, why are we saying that walking with The Lord ought to be a feast and not a fast? Because of what Jesus said next to clarify what He meant.

Mat 9:16 No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and the tear is made worse.

Mat 9:17 Nor do they put new wine into old wineskins, or else the wineskins break, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But they put new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved."

First, bear in mind Jesus has been talking about a bridegroom and a wedding feast. When He mentions the "garment" and the "wine," it is in the context of that feast.

Here is what I mean. In one of His parables Jesus describes a wedding feast whose guests are all given a new garment - a robe - to wear.

Then remember that His first miracle was turning water into new wine at a wedding in Cana.

It appears, then, that Jesus is saying that while fasting will continue as a spiritual discipline in His absence, the overall theme of our lives ought to be that of feasting with Him as our heavenly Bridegroom.

The illustrations are obvious enough. If you patch an old garment with a new piece of cloth, when that patch shrinks it will pull away and make the tear worse.

Likewise if you pour unfermented wine into an old, brittle wineskin, as it emits gases it will cause the wineskin to expand and burst.

Jesus had just predicted He would be rejected by the Jews. In a little while in the Gospel of Matthew, in chapter sixteen, He will predict the church - a new, called-out people that was a mystery until revealed by Him and the writers of the New Testament.

What The Lord was telling the disciples of John was that the life He was offering in relationship with Him was not a reformation of Judaism but a whole new way of living and of approaching life.

One commentator put it like this:

The patch and the new wine are images of a powerful, effervescent new relationship with God which bursts out of the dried-up confines of formal religion.

What I get out of all this is that, even though absent, Jesus wants us to be robed and filled, ready for His return. Our time on earth waiting may include spiritual disciplines like fasting but, overall, it is to be more feast-like - even when we must endure tribulations and sufferings and afflictions.

Keeping with the Jewish wedding customs, in other passages we learn we are betrothed to Jesus and are awaiting His any-moment return to whisk us away to the marriage.

When you are engaged, waiting for the big day, are you mourning and morose? Or are you excited with anticipation?

Well, if you're not excited with anticipation, you'd better call off the wedding.

If you are a believer, your life is to be more a feast than a fast. Don't succumb to those who would seek to burden you with disciplines claiming it will make you more spiritual.

Now I'm not suggesting we live undisciplined lives. Not at all. I am saying that walking around as if you were attending a funeral rather than waiting for your wedding is not what The Lord intends for you. It is not spiritual; it is carnal.

Maybe this will help. The disciples of John were, in one sense, following the fasting Pharisees instead of the feasting Bridegroom.

The habits and practices and disciplines of your life: Are you following fasting Pharisees or the feasting Bridegroom?