

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Mark 02: 18-22

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord! It's time to read the Bible again. Today, we will continue to read Mark chapter 2:18 to 22.

The Gospel of Mark, Chapter 2, records Jesus beginning His public ministry in the region of Galilee, particularly in the city of Capernaum, spreading the gospel and healing the sick. However, there is another more hidden line, which is the gradual increase in opposition to Jesus by the scribes and Pharisees. In the case of the paralytic being healed, they rose to question Jesus' authority to forgive sins; and in the case of Matthew or Levi being called, they began to criticize Jesus for eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners; and in today's passage, they further criticize Jesus and His disciples for not fasting; following which, in verses 23 to 28 of tomorrow's portion, they condemn Jesus and His disciples for not observing the Sabbath; and in the first section of chapter 3, which is verses 1-6, they see Jesus healing on the Sabbath, and then they begin to plot to remove Jesus. We see their opposition to Jesus and their hostility towards Him gradually increasing until finally, they are determined to eliminate Jesus. This also reminds us that if we are to establish a church on earth that is according to God's will, we will surely encounter obstacles from Satan. Therefore, we should more actively equip ourselves to truly understand God's will and the commission He has given us, rather than adhering to some religious traditions and rules of the law.

Today's passage addresses the issue of fasting. We need to understand that the true meaning of fasting is to follow God and carry out His commission. Sometimes our burden is very heavy, and we must come before God and earnestly seek Him. In such circumstances, it is natural and voluntary to set aside reasonable and legitimate needs, abstaining from food for a period of time. For example, in Acts 13:1-3, it is recorded that in the church at Antioch, five brothers gathered together to fast and pray, resulting in the Holy Spirit initiating a new beginning among them, instructing them to set apart Barnabas and Saul for the first missionary journey

among the Gentiles. Such fasting and prayer are very valuable as they help the church keep up with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This type of fasting and prayer is initiated by the Holy Spirit based on a specific need, rather than becoming a routine or some rules.

When Jesus was ministering on earth, the Pharisees at that time had already turned fasting into a religious rule, requiring everyone to fast at fixed times. In Luke 18:12, we are told that the Pharisees fasted twice a week, and during these times, they would put on sackcloth, look sorrowful, and even neglect grooming to make it obvious to others that they were fasting, appearing very devout. They turned fasting into a religious ritual. Against this background, we read verse 18.

Verse 18: "The disciples of John and of the Pharisees were fasting; then they came and said to Him, 'Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?'"

We can probably ascertain that the Pharisees' disciples were fasting to adhere to religious regulations, while John's disciples may have been fasting for two reasons. One, due to John's imprisonment, they fasted in sorrow and prayed, hoping for his release. Alternatively, in John's absence, they continued to follow the Jewish customs they were familiar with, fasting alongside the Pharisees as part of their way of life. It's uncertain whom they referred to when they came to inquire of Jesus. It could have been the Pharisees or John's disciples, or perhaps both groups together. Another possibility is a more neutral third party, who came to Jesus out of lack of understanding. The NIV takes this stance, translating it as "some people came," though the original text says "they." Personally, I lean towards the idea that it was John's disciples and the Pharisees who came to Jesus together. The Pharisees represented the old religious followers in Judaism, while John's disciples, already in the New Testament era, represented the new followers of the New Covenant, which is rather poignant.

The ministry of John the Baptist completely broke with religious tradition. He wore camel's hair and ate locusts and wild honey, baptizing people in the wilderness.

After John was imprisoned, his disciples seemed to backtrack and came with the Pharisees to question Jesus. They appeared to forget John's testimony for Jesus. When they came before Jesus, they asked Him, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Your disciples do not fast?" Clearly, it was a day designated for fasting by the Pharisees, one of the two days per week. Seeing Jesus and His disciples eating and drinking, they approached Him together. This is an improvement from the previous incident where the Pharisees dared not ask Jesus directly but questioned His disciples instead. Now let's see how Jesus responds.

Verse 19: "And 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.'"

Through their question, Jesus had the opportunity to respond, and His answer was insightful. Jesus used a familiar custom to answer their question. According to the customs of that time, the groom would spend the week before his wedding with his close friends, the companions mentioned in this verse, somewhat like today's groomsmen. Therefore, the companions could not fast. Here, Jesus compares Himself to the bridegroom, and His disciples are the companions. Now that Jesus and His disciples are together, it is a time of joy for them, a time to celebrate, so they should eat and drink, not fast.

Verse 20: "But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days."

Here, it says that the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away. According to their traditional customs, on the wedding day, the groom would leave his companions to go and marry the bride. When Jesus speaks of the days to come, He is referring to His own departure, which means Jesus will go to the cross according to the Father's will, to shed His blood and give His life to resolve the problem of sin. When He leaves, His disciples will fast.

However, this metaphor of the bridegroom marrying the bride does not stop here. According to the revelation of the Bible, we know that Jesus died 2,000 years ago, was resurrected, and then ascended to heaven. Now He sits at the right hand of the Father, performing His heavenly ministry, which is to supply His church. One day, when the church is mature and adorned, Christ will return to take the church as His bride. During this period when Christ is not physically present, His disciples, including us, must fast. But this fasting is not according to the Pharisees' regulations and rituals; rather, it is led by the Holy Spirit. According to the needs of the church and for specific burdens, the saints can come together to fast and pray, allowing the Holy Spirit to work more freely in the church. To make this clearer, Jesus used two more verses to reveal why it is necessary to break away from the ritualistic laws and regulations.

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."

The old garment has been washed many times and has already shrunk, so it will not shrink anymore. Due to repeated washing, the material has also become old and weak. If you sew a new piece of cloth onto the old garment, the new cloth has not been pre-shrunk. When the garment is washed, the new cloth will shrink, and the force of the first shrinkage is quite strong, tearing the already weak old garment. Thus, patching with a new cloth would cause more damage to the old garment than before. This is common knowledge, and Jesus used this example to convey a profound spiritual meaning. In the Bible, garments represent human behavior. The old garment refers to our old self and the behavior we exhibit under the existing framework of the law. Because humans are sinful, the old garment inevitably has holes and tears. The new cloth represents the new behavior that comes from Christ's new life. Using new cloth to patch an old garment symbolizes people seeing Jesus' good deeds and trying to imitate them, attempting to add some good deeds to their old behavior by emulating Jesus. Jesus tells us that this does not work—the shrinking force of the new cloth will tear the old garment. Imitating good deeds, if we think about it carefully, is precisely what human ethical education teaches:

adding some promotion of good deeds within a certain legal framework to help people avoid breaking the law. While this has some usefulness for societal stability and is the foundation of human ethical education, for Christians, it is the lowest standard. Christians' behavior should far surpass this.

Christians who have received Christ's salvation not only have new cloth but also a new garment, which is Christ as our righteousness. In the parallel passage in Luke 5:36, Jesus speaks more directly, saying, "No one puts a piece from a new garment on an old one; otherwise the new makes a tear, and also the piece that was taken out of the new does not match the old." This directly states that after being saved by grace and putting on Christ as our new garment, we cannot tear a piece from this new garment to patch the old one.

The new garment is entirely Christ's grace; we cannot use grace to patch up the flaws in our behavior. Doing so would tear the new garment, and the patch would not match the old garment. Colossians 3:9-10 clearly tells us to put off the old man with his deeds and to put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him.

The old garment is not worth mending; it should be taken off. Taking off the old garment means putting on the new garment, which is the new man who is being renewed to become like Jesus Christ. This passage clearly tells us that we should not imitate Jesus' behavior. First, we cannot truly learn it; second, partial learning and imitation will tear the behavior of the old self, creating a bigger tear. Therefore, the true teaching is to put off the old self. We have a new life, and letting this new life freely live out a new life will naturally renew us daily, growing into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

Verse 22: "And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine bursts the wineskins, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins."

The previous verse about new cloth and old garments refers to outward behavior, while this verse about new wine and new wineskins refers to our inner life. New wine is typically not fully fermented; it continues to ferment, producing carbon dioxide, a gas that creates pressure. If put into old wineskins, which have lost their elasticity from use, the old wineskins cannot withstand the pressure from the fermenting new wine and will burst. Therefore, new wine must be put into new wineskins, which are more elastic and can handle the pressure of the new wine.

We know that wine is the essence of the life of grapes; thus, new wine represents the new life that comes from Christ. This new life is fresh, lively, and full of energy and dynamism. If this new life is placed in old wineskins, which symbolize the religious system established by rituals, laws, regulations, and ceremonies—like Judaism, or even today's church structures that add human organizational frameworks—there would be problems. This means studying Christ with natural human thinking, interacting with Christ with natural human emotions, and serving Christ with natural human will, thereby creating a humanly devised organizational framework that becomes a new religious system. However, this is still an old wineskin, unable to withstand the vitality and dynamism of the new life in Christ. New wine should be placed in new wineskins.

What are new wineskins? They are the church established according to God's will. The definition of the church in Ephesians 1:23 is "the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." The church is meant to be filled with Christ. Christ is the only content of the church, and He must fully fill the church. Here, there are no legal rituals or regulations, no human organizational frameworks. Here, there is only Christ—Christ is everything. Only in a church that truly aligns with God's will can the new life from Christ be fully contained. This life can be lively, fresh, and operate and grow freely. The church can then grow into the body of Christ, fully obedient to Christ, the head, having suitable cooperation and organic operation, ultimately growing into the fullness of Christ.

Today's scripture gives Christ a good opportunity to reveal something. Christ is the bridegroom, and when the bridegroom is with the disciples, they should be joyful and celebrate together by eating and drinking, without the need to fast. When the

bridegroom leaves, the disciples will fast. This period is precisely the time for the church to be built up. The saints should follow the leading of the Holy Spirit, or according to specific burdens and needs, they may fast and pray, seeking God's will and following the Holy Spirit's guidance, rather than making it a ritual or regulation. Until one day, when the church is fully adorned, Christ will come again to take the church as His bride. At that time, every saint will wear new garments, with Christ as our righteousness. And in the new wineskin, which is the church aligned with God's will, the saints will grow to maturity, and the church will be fully adorned to welcome Christ's return.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You. The church is a living organism, Christ is our head, and we are the body of Christ, following the leading of the Holy Spirit. Grant the church times of joy, where Christ's presence is evident, and we can all eat and drink together in joy. Sometimes, You also allow the church to go through trials. In these trials, we experience Christ's absence, and we must fast and seek God's guidance for the church together. Help us all to learn and grow together in the church until that day when we can welcome Your return together. Bless the church I am in. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ.