

# Three Images, One Meaning

(Mt 9:14-17)

Introductory thoughts.

1. The same grouping of images is found in each of the 3 synoptics, but we will follow Matthew's narrative (Mk 2:18-22; Lk 5:31-39).
2. Whether these images/illustrations can all rightly be termed parables is debateable but for the purposes of this lesson the issue is immaterial and so will not be considered here.
3. What is evident is that all three address the same question. This aligns with the nature of parables, which are typically comparisons or everyday stories designed to convey one central spiritual truth. In this case, a single point is made in response to one question, expressed through three different illustrations.

## I. The Question And Reply (9:14).

### A. The Question (9:14).

1. John's disciples asked Jesus, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast so often, but Your disciples don't?"
  - a. Posed at a time when John was likely in prison (Mk 1:14), His followers were probably in deep grief and mourning.
  - b. Jesus replied with three illustrations, each highlighting the need to observe the propriety of things.

### B. The Three Illustrations (9:15-17).

1. The behaviour to be expected from the friends of the bridegroom (9:15).
  - a. Began with a rhetorical question followed up by a statement of what would happen in the future. "And Jesus said to them, Can the friends (5207) 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."
    - 1) The primary meaning of the Grk word is son/child descendent and in this verse is rendered variously in different translations. The ASV reads "sons of the bride chamber" with "companions" as a marg. note.
    - 2) The children of the bride-chamber that is, the bridemen, or [men who had the special care of the bridal chamber,] and who were therefore his special friends do not think of fasting while he is with them. With them it is a time of festivity and rejoicing; and mourning would not be appropriate. When he is removed, or taken away, [then] their festivity will be ended, and then will be the proper time of sorrow. So, says he, John, your friend and teacher, is in captivity. With you it is a time of deep grief, and it is [fit] that you should [fast.] I am [with] my disciples. It is, with them, a time of joy. It is not fit that they should use the tokens of grief, and fast now. When [I] am taken away, it will then be proper that they should fast (Barnes).
  - b. The claim to regular pharisaic fasting was not contested (Lk 18:12). It was just not fitting that His disciples should behave in that way at that time.
2. The approach to the selection of material when repairing cloth (9:16).
  - a. Agnaphos: "Unmilled, unfulled, undressed, unprocessed" (Thayer).
  - b. The fitness of such an approach was recognized by all.
3. The accepted practice When storing wine (9:17).
  - a. New skins would yield and stretch to allow for the fermenting wine and so there was a fitness in making this choice.

### C. Summary. All three images pressed the same point - certain behaviours were out of place.

## II. Applications For Today.

A. When we come together as the Lord's people .

1. The Christian age is an era of joy and not gloom.
  - a. "Euangelion" - "Originally denoted a reward for good tidings; later, the idea of reward dropped, and the word stood for the good news" itself" (Vine)
  - b. This being so the worship of those who assemble together in recognition of what God has done should be characterised by praise and thanksgiving.
  - c. Just as it was unfitting for disciples to fast while Jesus was physically with them, so it is unfitting for believers to gather in Christ's name and act as if His resurrection and presence mean nothing.
  - d. This is not to exclude the appropriateness of transient periods of sorrow, but this should be transformed into joy as in for instance the Lord's Supper as thought moves from death to resurrection.
2. In view of who God is, it is not fitting that we offer worship casually and irreverently (Psa 2:11; 96:8-9; Ecclesiastes 5:1-2; Jn 4:23-24; Heb 12:28-29 Rev 14:7).
  - a. Therefore we should give attention to how we dress.
    - 1) Some think of God as a grandfather-figure who will tolerate most things and therefore casual dress in this setting is perfectly acceptable.
    - 2) Another may reason that he wears a suit all week and so he prefers to use smart casual dress on a Sunday.
    - 3) I am not trying to press for address code, but I do argue that coming into the presence of our creator and saviour in this special way cannot be done lightly; it requires thought and care on the part of the worshipper as to what is worn.
  - b. It should also give us cause to reflect quietly for a few moments before the service begins.

B. In the individual life of a Christian certain things are not proper, fitting.

1. A life marked by constant gloom, despair, or penitence.
  - a. We have already touched upon how unsuitable it is for one who trusts in Christ to remain in constant heaviness of spirit or to let tomorrow's cares darken today's joy.
  - b. To be continually weighed down by the forgiven sins of a pre-Christian life is also unfitting (1 Cor 6:9-11).
2. The impropriety of a loose tongue.
  - a. Discussing personal family affairs with others.
  - b. Inappropriate subjects with children.

Summary.

1. What we have here is three illustrations which give the same answer to one question.
2. Propriety argued against the idea that the disciples of Jesus should fast whilst He was still with them.
3. In the same way certain things are not fitting today.