

Yeshua Teaches On Fasting and New Wine To Be Like Yeshua Means – To Serve Others

In my last post, we learned of Matthew's calling as a talmid and learned why Yeshua associated with sinners. In this post, we will learn what He has to say about fasting and new wine. The P'rushim not only questioned Yeshua about those with whom he had fellowship with at meals; but also, they questioned why Yeshua and his talmidim feasted instead of fasting on the customary days. Yeshua showed them the need for joy because the Messiah had come.

Fasting

"Next, Yochanan's talmidim came to him and asked, "Why is it that we and the P'rushim fast frequently, but your talmidim don't fast at all?" Yeshua said to them, "Can wedding guests mourn while the bridegroom is still with them? But the time will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them; then they will fast. No one patches an old coat with a piece of unshrunk cloth, because the patch tears away from the coat and leaves a worse hole. Nor do people put new wine in old wineskins; if they do, the skins burst, the wine spills and the wineskins are ruined. No, they pour new wine into freshly prepared wineskins, and in this way both are preserved." ~ Matthew 9:14-17

Yochanan's talmidim were the remaining talmidim of Yochanan the Baptist, a group that lasted into the second century (see Acts 19:1-9). These men and **the P'rushim** were fasting - that is, they were going without food in order to spend time in prayer, repenting and humbling themselves before God. The Old Testament Law set aside only one day a year as a required day of fasting for all Jews – Yom Kippur (Leviticus 16:29). The P'rushim, however, fasted on Mondays and Thursdays (see Luke 18:12) as an act of piety, and most likely they promoted this among the people.

The tense of the verb for **"fast"** indicates that the feast at Mathew's house happened at the very time that these people were fasting, apparently on one of the weekly fasting days. Yochanan's talmidim fasted as a sign of mourning for sin and to prepare them for the Messiah's coming. Yochanan the Baptist was in prison, and his talmidim found themselves siding with the P'rushim on this issue; they were fasting when they should have been feasting with Yeshua.

"Yeshua said to them, "Can wedding guests mourn while the bridegroom is still with them? But the time will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them; then they will fast."" In the Bible, people would fast in times of disaster and as a sign of their humility and repentance. Fasting represented mourning. During that time, the people approached God with humility and sorrow for sin. Fasting focused their attention on God and demonstrated their change of heart and their true devotion (see, for example, Judges 20:26; 1 Kings 21:27; Ezra 8:21; Joel 1:14; Jonah 3:5).

While Yeshua walked the earth, his presence was a cause for celebration - the Messiah had come! The people did not need to mourn; they needed to rejoice. Yeshua' presence was as joyous as the presence of the *bridegroom* at a wedding feast. The picture of Yeshua as a **"bridegroom"** comes from the Old Testament description of the wedding feast that God will prepare for himself and his people (Isaiah 54:5-6; Hosea 2:16-20). Yeshua did not condemn fasting. We read in Luke 4:2: **"During that time he ate nothing, and afterwards he was hungry."** He emphasized that fasting must be done at the right time for the right reasons. Yeshua knew, however, that soon He (**the bridegroom**) would be **taken away from them**.

New Wine

"No one patches an old coat with a piece of unshrunk cloth, because the patch tears away from the coat and leaves a worse hole. Nor do people put new wine in old wineskins; if they do, the

skins burst, the wine spills and the wineskins are ruined. No, they pour new wine into freshly prepared wineskins, and in this way both are preserved."

There are several interpretations of this "old versus new" illustration:

- **Law versus grace.** The old cloth and old wineskins represent people under the Old Testament Law, and the new cloth and new wineskins represent people under grace. This view, preserved by dispensationalists [Dispensationalists emphasize the teaching of prophecy and the imminent, at any moment, return of Yeshua.], stresses the complete break of the Old Testament view of obedience with the New Testament.
- **Old covenant versus new covenant.** The old cloth and old wineskins represent the older and partial understanding of God's will that had only a glimmer of understanding of God's grace as exemplified in the Gospel. The new covenant would reflect a new way of understanding what true faithfulness to the law would be under Messiah's authority. This view does justice to "**both are preserved**" (9:17) because it sees the revealed will of God as present in both old and new. But limiting Yeshua's words to apply to time in history alone misses his point.
- **Old system of spirituality versus new system.** This view sees continuity in the revealed will of God, both in the Old Testament Scripture and in the New Testament message of Messiah. The old cloth and wineskins referred to the old system of application of the law (rigid, legalistic) as typified by the worst teaching of the P'rushim. The old forms and traditions were characterized by the sorrow of fasting. The new attitude of spirituality is characterized by the joy of feasting as seen in Messiah and His talmidim. New attitudes and methods would be needed. When new attitudes are present, both the understanding of the will of God in Scripture and the new forms will be preserved.

Yeshua's arrival on earth ushered in a new time, a new covenant between God and people. The new covenant called for a new way of expressing personal faith. The newness of the Gospel could not be combined with the legalism of the P'rushim any more than **a piece of unshrunk cloth** should be used as a patch on **an old coat**. When the garment is washed, the patch will shrink, pull away from the old garment, and leave a **worse hole** than before.

The Messianic community was never meant to be a sect or adaptation of Judaism; rather, Messiah fulfills the intent of the Old Testament Scripture. The Jews, patiently waiting for their Messiah, should have recognized Yeshua as the Messiah and should have believed the Good News. The apostle Yochanan wrote, "**For the Torah was given through Moshe; grace and truth came through Yeshua the Messiah.**" (Yochanan 1:17). Both law and grace express God's nature. Moshe's law emphasized God's law and justice; Yeshua came to express God's mercy, love, and forgiveness. Moshe could only give the law; Messiah came to fulfill the law perfectly (5:17). The law reveals the nature and will of God; Yeshua reveals the nature and will of God. But while the law could only point out sin and condemn us, Yeshua gave his life to bring us forgiveness of sin and salvation. The parables of the cloth and the wineskins (9:17) apply to more than just fasting or to the P'rushim. They speak of Yeshua's entire mission and the new era He inaugurated by His entrance into human history.

The new wine was the newness of the gospel as exemplified in the person of Yeshua (Yochanan 2:1-11). Like old wineskins, the P'rushim and indeed the entire religious system of Judaism had become too rigid to accept Yeshua. They could not contain Him or His message in their traditions or rules. Their understanding of faithfulness to the law had become unsuitable for the fresh, dynamic power of Messiah's message. They were the self-appointed guardians of the "**old coat**" and the "**old wineskins**."

Yeshua did not come to abolish or annul the Law and the Prophets but to fulfill them (5:17). But this fulfillment required new approaches and new structures. Yeshua's words **and both are preserved**, reveal

that the new wine needed to be preserved in new forms. The new way of obedience to the law would be found in the authoritative teaching of Yeshua. Yeshua did not come to patch up the old religious system of Judaism with its rules and traditions. If He had, His message would have damaged it. His purpose was to bring in something new, though God's prophets had told about it centuries before. This new message said that God's Son would come to earth to offer all people forgiveness of sins and reconciliation. The gospel did not fit into the rigid legalistic system that had become the Jewish religion.

Lessons learned so far today from vv. 9-17:

1. As the **Bridegroom**, Yeshua came to give spiritual joy. The Believer' life is a feast, not a funeral.
2. The illustration of the **cloth** reminds us that He came to bring spiritual wholeness; He did not come to "**patch us up**" and then let us fall apart.
3. The image of the **wineskins** teaches that He gives spiritual fullness. Jewish religion was a worn-out wineskin that would burst if filled with the new wine of the Gospel. Yeshua did not come to renovate Moshe or even mix Law and grace. He came with new life! We must seek to be filled with the Spirit; desire the new wine of charity.

In my next post, we continue in the Christian Torah by looking at two more miracles of Yeshua.