

There is a word I've thought a lot about in my 40s that I didn't pay a whole lot of attention to in the previous decades of my existence. It isn't the word that's spelled AARP, nor is the hyphenated word senior-discount. Instead, it is this one: chronic. It means persisting for a longtime and constantly recurring. In my 20s and 30s, I thought the constant itching of the palm of my right hand meant that I was about to stumble upon the Ark of the Covenant, get rich off it, and ride into the sunset. Now, when the palm of my right-hand itches constantly, I do what the rest of those my age do and attribute it to my dastardly case of chronic psoriasis. But over the course of my ministry, I have noticed a chronic illness in the lives of God's people that isn't limited old goats like me. As a matter of fact, this chronic illness in the lives of some of God's people often goes undiagnosed and untreated over the course of their entire existence. It is the debilitating malady of being a chronic whiner and complainer. You've met those afflicted with this disease, haven't you? They come in a variety of shapes and sizes. They are the individuals that leave a comment card in the Suggestion Box of the Travel Agency after their sea cruise to Yemen that says: "no one told us there would be fish in the ocean and our children were scared." They might even drop one at the KOA Campground Front Desk that says: "I was bitten by mosquitos. The brochure did not mention mosquitos." They may even write a Google review about the Motel 6 in Daytona Beach that says: "We bought Ray-Ban sunglasses for \$3 from a vender outside the hotel and discovered later that they were not really authentic Ray-Ban sunglasses."

In the passage before us today, you are going to hear from a group of chronic whiners and complainers who leave a comment card in the Suggestion Box everywhere Jesus goes. They have slowly started to follow Jesus and His disciples around now that his public ministry has started to reach a lot of people and they will not stop keeping tabs on our Lord from a distance until they see Him nailed to a tree. Last week, we found this group of whiners and complainers parked in the no parking section at Matthew's house asking aloud why in the world this Jesus person would dine with tax collectors and sinners. The week before that, this group we saw them stationed in among the crowds and complaining about Jesus' pronouncement of forgiveness to a paralyzed man who came in through the roof. Today, they leave this comment in the Spiritual Suggestion Box: why do the disciples of John the Baptist and the disciples of the Pharisees fast but yours do not? Some were scribes. Some were Pharisees. Some were ordinary, everyday people. But all of them, somewhere along the way, forgot that the joy of the Lord must be our strength every day. Because when it isn't, our view of how we relate to God and each other gets skewed. You see, right now in our churches across the world, there are among the people of God a segment of followers of Jesus who view their devotion to our Lord much like a somber funeral procession. But according to our Lord, in the first series of parables ever recorded in the New Testament, the Christian life isn't to be viewed as a somber funeral procession. Instead, it is to be viewed as a joyful wedding feast. That's because the joy of the Lord is our birthright as a child of the King. So here is why you need to listen today: your perspective on this very issue Jesus addresses right here in this passage will affect everything about you. If I live the Christian life as a funeral procession, whining and complaining is sure to follow. If I live it as a wedding feast, the joy of the Lord is sure to follow. So today church, I want to show you the difference between Funeral Procession Christianity and Wedding Feast Christianity. To do that, please turn with me to Mark 2:18-22.

¹⁸ Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. Some people came and asked Jesus, "How is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?" ¹⁹ Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them. ²⁰ But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast. ²¹ "No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. Otherwise, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse. ²² And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins."

Funeral vs Wedding Feast Christianity

1. Countenance of despair for the world to see. Countenance of joy for the world to see (18).

- **Anniversary Roses:** (1) My credit card company knows our anniversary so well, they used to send my wife flowers on it. (2) I say "used to" because somewhere along the way, I figured it wise if I wanted to stay married to buy them myself. (3) Suppose I did what I was supposed to and gave her flowers while saying these words with gloom on my face: "Hey. I bought you flowers because that's what I'm supposed to do on this special day." What would her response be? What would the response of those who witnessed it be? (3) Now if I bought her flowers and gave them with joy in my heart, the response would be as it should, wouldn't it? The New Covenant is like that. Holiness in the New Covenant begins and ends with joy.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** The people who saw the Pharisees and John the Baptist's disciples fasting thought it wasn't fair for Jesus' disciples to be rejoicing and joyful while they were mourning and miserable. Holiness to them was solemnity, somberness, and EXTRA acts of religious exercises of piety. But for Jesus, holiness started and ended with joy.
- **Going Above and Beyond in Religious Exercises:** (1) In verse 18, people – seemingly influenced by the Pharisees and/or John the Baptist's disciples – raise the issue as to why Jesus' disciples were not fasting like the other groups. The assumption here is they think Jesus' disciples are less reverent and holy than the others because of it. (2) The Mosaic law, however, only commands fasting to be done for everyone in Israel just one time per year: on the Day of Atonement. (3) John's disciples hoped to usher in the Messianic Age by fasting for weeks at a time in the wilderness and the Pharisees added to the law of Moses by fasting twice a week and then said to the rest of Israel: "so, now, must you also." (3) The problem with both was they were devoid of joy.

- **App:** We are much like these individuals in the Bible. We associate “greater” holiness with more fasting, more prayer, more self-denial, more giving, more everything. But if these exercises of faith – which are great spiritual disciplines in and of themselves – lack the joy of the Lord, it’s not holiness. It’s a funeral. When Jesus has called us to be the wedding feast to the world.
2. **God with us they miss. God with us they know (19-20).**
- **Wedding Receptions:** (1) I’ve learned that in life you never really know people that well until you see them at a wedding reception. (2) Mr. and Mrs. Maple might seem like curmudgeons to the paperboy. But when you see them start dancing to Chubby Checker over the loudspeaker, you know there is joy in their heart somewhere. (3) Old Poppa Puffingham might seem like a non-emotional male, but when he gives his speech in tears, you know there is joy in his heart somewhere. (4) Why? Because the bride and groom are united, and the feast is a celebration of that fact.
 - **Main Idea of the Point:** In the OT, Israel, the “bride” often mourned because the “bridegroom” (God) seemed absent. In the New Covenant, the bride (the body of Christ) rejoices because the bridegroom (Jesus) is present. And because he is, the Christian life is to be lived as a wedding reception because will never leave us nor forsake us.
 - **An Answer to a Question That Made Their Jaws Drop:** (1) To the question related to fasting, Jesus answers with wedding imagery the people were familiar with. (2) The Bride in the OT was Israel. They mourned while waiting for the “Bridegroom” (God). (3) Jesus proclaims himself to be the bridegroom in the flesh. Thus, the reason there’s no need for the disciples to mourn. They will when he dies (something no one would have understood). But just his presence with them was an occasion for joy.
 - **App:** As long as God’s presence is operable – and it always will be in this life and the next – the joy of the Lord is to be continuous, even in times of grief. That’s because joy isn’t an emotion. It’s an internal function of a soul that can say “it is well” in every circumstance.
3. **Longing for what was. Delight in what is (21).**
- **The Best Way Set the Stock Market Ablaze:** (1) Go to Goodwill. Buy every pair of women’s blue jeans you can find. Cut a bunch of holes in them. Stick a sleek looking designer label on them. Sell them for a hundred bucks a piece. The market would correct itself overnight. (2) I know this because my daughter has ten pairs of jeans in her closet just like this. Jeans I could have used my buck knife on and saved a bunch of money.
 - **Main Idea of the Point:** Jesus didn’t come into this world to patch up the Old Covenant. He couldn’t because the Old Covenant was designed to reveal what sin was by our failure to live up to its terms. The Pharisees desired to live under this curse. He came into this world to extend grace to those looked to him to break the curse. And living in that grace is what is. And it produces joy.
 - **The First Parable in the NT was not a Mistake:** (1) Jesus used parables from everyday life to teach spiritual lessons. They didn’t have an invitation except to draw your own conclusions. (2) This is the first parable ever recorded because Mark was the first Gospel written. (3) It is a parable that deals with Jesus’ relationship to the Law, or the Ten Commandments. (4) If you put an unshrunk patch on an old garment, the tear would be worse. (5) Jesus is saying he didn’t come into this world as a patch for the tear in the Old Covenant. He came to make a new one. (6) According to the rest of the NT, the Old Covenant introduced a curse (because we can’t follow it). If Jesus is just a patch, then that would imply it is now possible to fulfill it. But that’s not what Jesus says. Instead, it is a New Covenant. One built on amazing grace where the law is not written on tablets of stone, but in the Christian’s heart.
 - **App:** Show me a Christian who lacks joy and I’ll show you one whose mouth may confess Christ. But his/her head and heart still live under a yoke. If you really know and have experienced grace, joy is the surest sign of it.
4. **Old wineskins work just fine. New wineskins still have room to grow and expand (22).**
- **My Greatest Physical Fear** – (1) Some people have a fear of falling or a fear of drowning. (2) I have a fear of atherosclerosis. My grandfather had it. My father had it. And I’m now trying to do everything I can prevent it. (3) Cardiologists tell us it is the hardening of the arteries. I worry about it because I don’t desire it.
 - **Main Idea of the Point** – The surest way to get a hardening of the heart, which always leads to chronic complaining and Funeral Procession Christianity is to say, “my old wineskins work just fine.” That’s what the Pharisees did. They refused to grow in their relationship with God. But the best way to prevent spiritual atherosclerosis is to say, “my new wineskins have plenty of room to grow and expand.”
 - **The Second Parable in the NT wasn’t a Mistake Either:** (1) It follows the first. Since Jesus didn’t come to patch us up, but to make us new. And since the Pharisees still insisted on living under a curse themselves and insisting others to do the same, then they had a container problem. (2) That problem was this: like Pharoah, they had atherosclerosis of the heart and soul. (3) As a way of rebuking that mentality, Jesus says you can’t put new wine into old wineskins, or they will burst. (4) New wine requires new wineskins and new wineskins had to be flexible. They had to have room for growth. The Pharisees didn’t. That’s why their religious perspective was equivalent to a funeral procession. The disciples did. That’s why they viewed their relationship to Jesus like a wedding feast.
 - **App:** You see, one of the most important aspects of joy is the journey of faith itself. Those that lack joy have no room for the journey. They’ve already arrived in their estimation. But new wineskin Christians – ever being changed into the image of God – are the ones who taste the sweetness of the new wine: Jesus. Praise be to God.