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July 30, 1995

### **Same Words - Different Questions**

Have you ever had someone ask you a question and you are not exactly sure how to take it? Larry Desmone and I had just finished doing some soap box street evangelism near the Tower of London and were in the underground train waiting to go back to the mission. As we stood there talking, a couple guys sauntered up with unlit cigarettes hanging out of their mouths, and asked me "Hey mate, have you got a light for my fag?" I turned looked at him and his mate and coldly replied, "I most certainly do not!" My problem was misunderstanding. I did not realize that he was referring not to his friend, but to his unlit cigarette. Sometime the exact same words can mean different things. It depends on the culture, the context and who it that has said them. If we miss one of these clues, we may hear a teenager say something is bad and really think that it is something to be avoided. But now if your grandmother was to say something is bad, it might really be awful. If also depends on the way it is being said. This is bad or this is bad. The same words but entirely different meaning.

This can also happen in the Bible. Same exact words, but very different question, depending on who is saying it. The problem we have in deciphering what is said is that we don't have recordings of the conversations between Jesus and the disciples, the crowds, the authorities. So, we have to rely on the reactions and responses to see what was meant by the questions. Such is the case in our passage today. Two groups come to Jesus and ask Him a question. Yet, Jesus gives two different answers. This tells us that maybe, just maybe Jesus could discern the thoughts of those asking and knew what their real question was. John's disciples and the Pharisees were using the exact same words when they asked Jesus the question, but they were coming from two totally different perspectives.

Turn with me to Mark 2:18-22. Jesus has just established his ministry objection. "I come to save not the self righteous, I have come to

save sinners." He was out there where the sinners lived. Not living like the sinners, not condoning their sin, but He was living and teaching and drawing them to God. These were the folks that wouldn't be caught walking in through the doors of a church, but folks that desperately needed Him. This however was a bit scandalous for some of the church people. They were questioning Him about this strange behavior. It looked like Jesus was compromising His lifestyle with heathens. But Jesus quickly replies with a couple of illustrations to explain and answer his actions. Jesus is saying, I am bringing something totally new. This is not a religious upgrade version 6.5. This is not a best of both worlds compromise. This is a radical life changing, wineskin bursting change from your life prior to Christ. If you are a Christian, there should be some changes in your thinking. We are to be glad in the transforming presence of the Bridegroom. Radically changed in the presence of Jesus. Lets read the story in Mark 2:18-22 (READ)

To fast or not to fast is that not the question? Those were the words but Jesus knew the real question behind those words. Same words, different questions. Jesus first answers John's disciples question. Why don't your disciples fast? We do. Remember John the Baptizer has been taken captive by Herod Antipas. John is being held in the castle dungeon for preaching condemnation against Antipas for unlawfully taking his brother's wife Herodias for his own. Antipas is frightened of the crowds due to John's popularity so he doesn't kill him immediately. John's disciples are fasting and mourning because their leader and guide is captive. They observe Jesus and His disciples eating and drinking and fasting and are a bit confused. This was so different from the "Way of God" that they were familiar with. John's message was repentance. Turn or burn. An appropriate response was fasting. These disciples of John loved Jesus. They wanted to truly follow God. Yet, they didn't understand. They were confused as to why Jesus who may be the Messiah would be acting like a party goer. Their whole lives they had been taught that fasting is helpful in producing Godly character. Everyone they knew that had been serious about God engaged in fasting. Yet, Jesus and his disciples...no fasting. In fact they did the opposite. While John was rotting in prison, Jesus was off partying with tax collectors. John preached repentance..appropriate response was to fast.

Look at Jesus answer in verse 19. Jesus preached belief and hope and the kingdom of God...the appropriate response was to feast in the presence of the Bridegroom. We are to celebrate in the presence of the king. Jesus is saying to John's disciples, This is what you have been waiting for! This is what you've been hoping for. This is what you have been longing for. Jesus said, The king is here. I did not come to bring sadness, I came to bring gladness!" The king is here! Jesus recalls the picture of marriage to those Jewish readers. They would recall the picture of a committed relationship with God and His people. Weddings are a time of gladness not sadness. While I am here people should party, be festive, be filled with joy.

John's disciples asked an honest question. They were confused about Jesus actions in feasting and not fasting. They were assuming that if Jesus were from God, He would look a lot more like the Godliness they were familiar with. They may have come to listen to Jesus thinking that He was a religious upgrade, the latest version with only a few minor enhancements. Jesus says, No what I am about is not an upgrade...it's something totally new. It involves a radical change and fulfillment of what you've all been waiting for. You no longer have to pine away longing for a bridegroom..I'm here! Be Glad!

These disciples questioned Jesus. Is it OK for us to question Jesus? Is OK to lay out our doubts and fears our frustrations and those times when we are just plain confused about what God is doing in our lives? We know that God is God. We also know that God is good. The secularist says he cannot be both God and good because of all the rotten things that happen to us. I conjecture the problem is not in the goodness of God, but due to basing goodness on our own standard of what we think is good. We think sickness, suffering, hardship, loss of a loved one, financial failure, dysfunctional upbringing and pain are all bad things. We pray to God that they be removed. And I believe He has the power to remove them. I also believe that suffering and pain can sometimes be the catalyst for a deeper dependence on God that we have never known before. A closer relationship, a purer walk with Him, a joy under trials that we could never have experienced had we never known pain. I wonder if God would see these character forging times as good or bad? Is it OK to question God? Yes, do it...He wants to hear us. He is

not so weak that he cannot listen to our confused questions. The key however, is in the attitude. Are you truly seeking an answer, loving God and humbly inquiring before Him? Or are you questioning in defiant rebellion hoping by trickery to discount His power and love and grace.

This was exactly what the Pharisee were thinking when they asked the question of Jesus. "Why do your disciples not fast?" When the Pharisees asked this question they were hoping to uncover some hypocrisy in Jesus holiness. They were wanting to possibly mute his popularity with the people; stifle His effectiveness with the masses. The Pharisees loved to show people how they suffered during the fast days. Oh, I'm so hungry (groan, groan) i.e. I'm so holy look at me fast. They encouraged fasting two days a week on Monday and Thursday. While the rest of the Jews were required to fast only one day a year on the Day of Atonement. They fasted to prove their spirituality to the world. They were amazed by His insights and teaching, but wondered why Jesus didn't fast, like they obviously did. I think they would have liked to have this crowd drawing Jesus on their side. I think they wanted Jesus to be a bit more compromising. I think they would have loved to take the best that Pharisaic Judaism had to offer and the best that the teachings of Jesus had to offer and to compromise a belief. "Jesus, why do you have to be soooo different? Can't we work something out here?" Jesus saw right through their attempts to pressure and push for compromise and answered with this parable in verse 21-22. If the new patch is put on a hole that hasn't shrunk yet, it will rip and makes things even worse. If you place some new wine that hasn't yet fermented, in an old leather bota bag. It's gases of fermentation are going to burst that wineskin. Jesus is challenging more than an interpretation of the Law. He is challenging more than rigid legalism, He is stating clearly to the religious authorities. I am not a new patch that is going to fix up worn out legalistic Judaism. What I am about is incompatible with the old. We cannot fix and mend we must throw out and replace. This is not an enhanced upgrade, we cannot do a best of both world, compromise is not an option, You must choose. Jesus challenged a clean break with the past. The Pharisees loved power and control more then God. They felt threatened by Jesus and began to resort to trickery. Their hearts were rock hard and unwilling to change. They might compromise, they were

happy for Jesus to change, but then no they were set. Even though the evidence is Jesus teaching and miracles stared at them in the face. They were set, no change.

Same words, two different questions. How does Jesus want you to respond? What does He want us to do?

1) Enjoy being glad in the transforming presence of Jesus the bridegroom. Allow Him to change your heart, your thinking, your attitudes.

Maybe for some of us who have grown up in the church, like John's disciples, it involves being open to what God is doing to reach people today. What was great and used by God in the fifties may not necessarily be the tool to reach this generation. This can be confusing. It's OK to question. Is this the direction your heading God? Is this where God wants us to be? It sure seems a lot different from fasting, it's a lot different from the way we've always done things, but I want to be where your heading God. Maybe that's where your at today. I would encourage you to enjoy being glad in the transforming presence of the bridegroom, honestly seek His heart.

Maybe God's sweet wine of grace needs to burst some of your old wineskins of legalism and traditions, maybe some faulty thinking about God. Maybe like those Pharisees, you were coming to Jesus wanting to hold on to your old ways of getting by. They thought fasting and being good enough was going to make it with God. Let me tell you there is no one who is good enough to relate with God. The only way we can come to God is by drinking deeply the transforming wine of grace that Jesus offers. We can't clean ourselves up good enough to get back right with God. We don't do the cleaning God does. Maybe, you have thought if I go with God, I must be stoic, no fun sour faced boring critical of everyone. Jesus says, In my presence I desire gladness not sadness. I came to bring freedom not bondage. I want you to experience life filled with hope and joy, not drudgery.

Jesus came to bring something new. It's not just another religion that's as good as the rest. 65% of Americans believe that Christians, Jews, Muslims and Buddhists are all praying to the same God, but just different names. They say it doesn't matter what God or higher power you pray to because the universal God force will respond regardless. No.

Jesus came not as a religious upgrade, not as a best of the best religion compromise. He came to burst some wineskins to bring fresh release to captive hearts. He came to bring something new and fresh. Let's begin to live like it.