

XLI. Matthew in Biblical Perspective
A Royal Manifesto of the Kingdom from the King
“Wine, Wineskins and the Wedding”
Matthew 9:14–17
Dr. Harry L. Reeder III
July 14, 2013 – Morning Sermon

We are in Matthew 9:14 for this study. As we work our way through the text this morning I’m going to start by looking at two other texts that will help us with this one. I’d like to first look at John 3 where we see early in the life of John the Baptist’s ministry the jealousy of his disciples was manifested as they came to John with a question. Jesus is baptizing and John’s disciples are baptizing. John 3:25–30 says [25] *Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification. [26] And they came to John and said to him, “Rabbi, he (Jesus) who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him.” [27] John answered, “A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. [28] You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.’ [29] The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. [30] He must increase, but I must decrease.”*

Now let’s look at Matthew 25, this marvelous parable that Jesus gives to help us focus on the second coming, when the Bridegroom who purchased the bride in His first advent will come to consummate the marriage at the marriage feast with His bride at His second advent. We call it the parable of the ten virgins. Matthew 25:1–13 says [1] *“Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. [2] Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. [3] For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, [4] but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. [5] As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. [6] But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ [7] Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. [8] And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ [9] But the wise answered, saying, ‘Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.’ [10] And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. [11] Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ [12] But he answered, ‘Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.’ [13] Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour, (and if I could fill in the blank here) that the Bridegroom returns.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may this His Word be preached for you.

Now with singular purpose go to Matthew 9:14 but before we get to this text I’d like to share two things with you. One, we are coming to a text that I think is extremely crucial. I believe that our country is in great need of a great awakening to come to His church and through His church to our country. Do you believe that? God’s Word reveals and history affirms that when God does a great work in His church and through His church into nations and beyond nations into the world that God has designed four things that are vital to the outpouring of a new thing that the Lord does in and through His

people. I will give them to you later in the study but three of them to some degree we are practicing and desire to grow in them. One of them is almost totally absent among God's people today and may be one of the reasons God has not poured forth His blessing of a new thing in His church and through His church into the world.

Every time God does something in the Bible these four things precede it. You'll find it in church history that affirms it. Three of them to some degree we're embracing and one is almost totally absent. I confess that in my life it is not like it ought to be. The text in this study gives us clarity on that one thing but the very text that gives us clarity on it has been used to divert us away from it because this text has been used by contemporary teachers and leaders to reinvent a message and a method that God would not know. Instead of taking God's design, I have books on my shelf that have used this text to tell the church we can't reach the world until we do something about our message, means and method. These books say the message and the means are outdated.

This is the text that is used to move us from Biblical faithfulness to God's design to self-confidence in our personal ingenuity and creativity. Thus we miss what God has put in place because we become absorbed in our own ingenuity and creativity. I love ingenuity and creativity at a certain level but not at the level that abandons what this text is teaching us. Because of that we're missing what God says ought to be a vital part of the life of His people and the church through which we draw near to God, He draws near to us and then through us to the world.

We are about to look at a text that is also recorded in Luke 5 and Mark 2. I won't be looking specifically at those passages but I will be referring to them as we study the account in Matthew 9. The theme of the Gospel of Matthew is an evangelistic biography declaring that Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Christ of Scripture, who was sent by the Father, verified by the Holy Spirit, and now proclaimed as King and Savior to all the nations until His returns in glory. Matthew's burden is for the Jewish people to hear that and then through them to go to all the world and then from the world back to the Jewish people. That's why he unfolds it with five books and we're in the third book of Matthew's Gospel. We are in Matthew 8 through 10. In this study we'll walk through Matthew 9:14–17 step by step looking at a question, an illustration, the answer, more illustrations and then the ultimate answer.

First, what is the one question that comes to Jesus at this moment? Matthew 9:14 says [14] *Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, "Why do we (John's disciples) and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?"* So here is the question. The word 'then' refers to what we studied in the last study of Matthew and that had to do with the conversion and call of Matthew. As soon as Matthew was converted and called he threw a dinner party. Jesus is the guest of honor, he invited the disciples and in his modesty Matthew just says he was reclining at the table but Luke's Gospel says it was a great banquet. At the banquet Jesus has the opportunity to affirm that He has not come for the righteous (which there is none) but He has come for sinners who are not blinded by their self-righteousness but who will flee to Him for eternal life.

As they leave the banquet this becomes an opportunity for a question that obviously had been talked about by the people in general, John's disciples in particular and the Pharisees specifically. Very likely the banquet must have fallen on a fast day. We know the Pharisees fasted to be seen by other people. That was hypocrisy but John's disciples are not like the Pharisees for they are fasting for another reason. So they want

to know why Jesus' disciples don't fast and Jesus answers it. He does not contradict the question in His answer. It seems as though John's disciples have made a pretty correct observation so Jesus is going to answer why they don't fast.

You might be thinking Jesus must have fasted because the Old Testament told us to fast but it only said to do it once a year. There is only one commandment in the Old Testament to fast. John's disciples and the Pharisees had created a regiment to fasting which is not sinful unless you do it to be seen by men but the only command given was in Leviticus 26 and that was you fasted on the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, longing for the promise of the atonement to come into reality. So Jesus' disciples don't make a regular habit of fasting other than for the Day of Atonement and John's disciples have asked Him why. Jesus answers the question interestingly. When I'm preaching and teaching I try to teach you something and then I try to illustrate it. Jesus on this occasion flips that. He doesn't give the answer in the illustration but He gives the illustration to give the answer.

There are three illustrations in this text and here is the first one found in Matthew 9:15 which says [15] *And Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast."* Jesus gives the illustration of a wedding and clearly He is saying the reason His disciples aren't fasting is because it is the wedding time and the Bridegroom is here. Why would they fast? Jesus is saying "I am here and I make all things new." What would they mourn for or fast for? This illustration is very powerful because it gives an immediate answer to the question posed from John's disciples. Jesus' disciples aren't fasting because the Bridegroom is here.

This one illustration is saying three things in His immediate answer. First of all, Jesus affirms His deity and His Messianic call as the Bridegroom. When Jesus calls Himself the Bridegroom this would not have been missed by the people of His day. This was an affirmation of His deity that claimed to be the Messiah. They would know immediately what He was saying because they knew Isaiah 62, Hosea, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. In all of those books it is very clear who the Bridegroom is. God's covenant people are the bride and the Bridegroom is God Himself. So when Jesus says He is the Bridegroom He is saying I am the Son of God that has come in the flesh as the Messiah and they would have not missed that. That was an affirmation of His deity and His call as the Messiah.

The second thing this illustration brings out is an insight into an Old Covenant fasting. Matthew 9:15 said "Can the wedding guests mourn" and the fasting of the Old Covenant was the fasting of mourning. There have been promises, shadows, types, statements, and symbols but for hundreds of years, where is the fulfillment? There is the mourning of the Old Covenant fast. So the second thing Jesus brings out here is insight into the Old Covenant fasting which is mourning. It is one of hungeriness, not having tasted of it. It is one of unmet expectations that are heightened because of all the promises, prophesies, types and symbols yet there is a mourning for them to be met.

The third thing Jesus reveals in this illustration is a twofold prophecy. The first prophesy is the Bridegroom who is with you will be taken away and until He returns, here is the second part of the prophesy, then they will fast. So the Bridegroom is with you here so why fast? All of our expectations are met in Him. Now He is going to be taken away and until He comes again, then My people will fast.

The question is, what does it mean to be taken away? The commentators are divided on this. I'm not divided on this and I'm going to tell you what I think. I think that about sixty percent of the commentators are wrong and I think me and the forty percent are right. The sixty percent say the taken away is referring to the three days of His death and burial and that would send them into mourning. Then He comes again and now He is resurrected and that does away with it. That's appealing but I don't think that's right. I want to tell you why I don't think that's right.

First of all, John's disciples who have asked this question along with some of the people there, have to remember what their mentor had said earlier. When they asked John if he was the Messiah he said "No, I'm not the Messiah, I'm the one who comes before Him." Then when Jesus came up to Him to be baptized John said "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Here's the Messiah." Then when John's disciples were envious and jealous of all the people going to Jesus to be baptizing, John said "He's the Bridegroom. I'm the best man. Why should I be jealous? This is why the best man is here. It is for the Bridegroom to bring joy to everyone." They have to remember what John said about Jesus and they have to remember what Isaiah, Hosea, Jeremiah and Ezekiel said. We're wedding guests. We're not the best man but we're wedding guests and we're rejoicing that the Bridegroom is here but then the Bridegroom will be taken away. Is that simply referring to a couple of days between His crucifixion and resurrection?

I think it's referring to the point from His ascension until His second coming and that's why we looked at Matthew 25 where the Bridegroom is away so be ready for the One who is taken up will come again. The One who was taken away to the seat of glory and intercession will come again when His purchased bride has been brought together and then it will be consummated at the marriage feast. I think that is what it is referring to. Plus I believe that is what the early church believed. Go through the book of Acts and five times you'll see that the church fasted after the ascension of Jesus. You will also see it in I and II Corinthians and Romans. Fasting was a part of the church's life to this day.

This is the point in my preparation that I went to my knees in conviction. Do you believe the Bridegroom came 2,000 years ago? Yes. Do you believe the Bridegroom was taken up and away to heaven? Yes. In other words, prophecy was fulfilled. The second part of the prophecy was that until He comes back His people will fast. Are you fasting? Am I fasting a New Covenant fast?

When I think of this I think of a photo from my wedding album that has held together for forty plus years. In this picture which I'd be happy to show you if you ever come to my house, is my wife and her dad. Upon the face of my wife is a look that I have seen on numerous occasions in the last 43 years. It is not a pleasant look. It is a look of at best, benevolent disgust. The rest of the pictures in our album have wonderful smiles but not this one. The reason for this look was that I was ten minutes late for the wedding. That picture was taken while I was late. She was not happy. When I finally got there we now had some smiles.

Forget me, our Bridegroom has come so why would we mourn? Why would we have any other look but joy that He has come? Now He has been taken away as His purchased bride is being gathered from all the nations and we will fast for that glorious coming again and His visitation time and again until He comes again. However some of

you are quick to say “He’s been taken away but what about Matthew 28?” Matthew 28:19–20 says [19] “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, **I am with you always**, to the end of the age.” Pastor, He has not been taken away for this verse says He is with us or the other verse that says where two or three are gathered in My name there I am in the midst. So isn’t He here? Yes and no. He is here by His Holy Spirit, the down payment, the earnest outpouring of His presence.

Then He said “*I must go away. (John 14:3) [3] And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.*” So we are with Him by the presence of the Holy Spirit by faith but on that day when He comes again and there is a new heavens and a new earth, behold I shall see Him. I shall see Him who has loved me and saved me. That’s why Paul talks about being homesick because that’s home and this isn’t. Home is where He is and I’m on my way home. Absent from the body is to be present with the Lord (II Corinthians 5:8). In the body is the Lord present with me by the Holy Spirit? Absolutely, but I am yet to be with Him intimately, personally, visibly, visually and experientially face to face. Until that occurs I have a mission and I can’t do that mission without the outpouring of His gracious Holy Spirit’s presence. So I fast because God has ordained it until He comes again. When I’m taken away they will fast, Jesus says, longing for my return, longing for the taste of Me, longing to feast upon Me, longing to be filled by Me.

That’s why He then gives two more illustrations to give us an ultimate answer. Here is His next illustration to tell us about the in between time until He comes again. Jesus says His people will fast but not like they were doing now. Matthew 9:16 says [16] *No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch tears away from the garment, and a worse tear is made.* When My people fast it won’t be the fast of Old Covenant mourning. It will be a different fast. That fast will not fit the garment of the New Covenant for it is not a fast of unmet expectations. It is a fast of deeper met expectations. My people aren’t going to patch the Old Covenant fasting on the garment that I give to them. When I was a kid and your clothes tore you didn’t go buy more for you patched what you had. You didn’t patch it with a new cloth. You had to get it shrunk first because if you put a new patch on an old garment and washed it the new patch would shrink and then tear the old garment.

Then Jesus gave them another illustration of this. Matthew 9:17 says [17] *Neither is new wine put into old wineskins. If it is, the skins burst and the wine is spilled and the skins are destroyed. But new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved.*” So when I (Jesus) am taken away I’ll give you new wine and new wineskin. They would kill an animal and get everything they wanted out of the animal. Then they would sew up the legs, open up the neck, put a stopper in it and it became a wineskin. Then you put the wine in it and as the wine began to expand and ferment the skin would also expand with it. Now we have new wine and if you put the new wine into the old wineskin that is not flexible anymore, then when the new wine ferments and expands it will cause the old wineskin to burst and you’ll lose the wine and the wineskin. But Jesus is going to give us new wine and a new wineskin and He is going to keep for us this new wine and wineskin.

What is He talking about when He says that? He is going to give us a new wine for behold He makes all things new. I bring to you a New Covenant. You're not going to go to the blood of bulls and goats for you have the Lamb of God. You're not going to mourn because you need your sins forgiven for they have been paid for on the cross. You're not going to go back to the rituals and complexity of that Old Covenant because I have made a New Covenant. We're not going to have a covenant people defined by a theocracy in a nation for I'm going to give a New Covenant. I have a new wineskin and it's the church of Jesus Christ and it will go from nation to nation and culture to culture. It will be flexible. It will work and I'll fill it with this New Covenant message. I will give the new wineskin and the new wine. I will pour out My Spirit upon all mankind. There will be a New Covenant where they will know the Lord. In this New Covenant you'll have a new record, a new heart, and a new spirit.

He says, I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord GOD, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes (Ezekiel 36:23). You won't have to become a Jew to come into this New Covenant. I will make you My people and give you a new record, a new heart and pour out My Spirit upon you. I will sprinkle you clean with new water. My people will come from all the nations and they shall come in. This is My wineskin I've designed to go from nation to nation and culture to culture. So I have given you a New Covenant and I'll do a new work in you personally. I'll make you a new wineskin. If any man be in Christ he is a new creation, the old has passed away and the new has come (II Corinthians 5:17). You are born again. I will now have My covenant people as the New Covenant church that goes from nation to nation. I'll not only do a work corporately for My covenant people, personally I'll make them individually a new wineskin and the church will be a new wineskin. I'll pour forth the New Covenant message of forgiveness of sins, a new heart, new record, a new life and I will fill them with the Holy Spirit. I have the wineskin and the wine.

This isn't a call to our inventiveness and I'm not opposed to thinking what the best way is to reach this group of people or that group of people. That is not what I'm talking about. Jesus is not looking for engineers and architects for His church. We are not to invent the church, we're to implement the church. We have the message that the world needs. We don't make the Gospel relevant. There is nothing more relevant in the world than the Gospel. We have the wine and the wineskin and the One who makes all things new. So what is our takeaway?

The takeaway is while the Bridegroom's presence renders the Old Covenant in general and Old Covenant fasting in particular, obsolete, the Bridegroom's absence renders the New Covenant in general and New Covenant fasting in particular, vital. The Old Covenant is now obsolete. That does not mean it is bad for it has done its job. The purpose of the Old Covenant was to get us ready for the coming of Christ. Now we have the New Covenant. Now that we have the New Covenant in Jesus Christ, the new wine and the new wineskins, we don't need to go back to the Old Covenant.

I get so frustrated with people's fascination with not learning how the Old Testament points us to Christ but that this notion of Christ and the New Covenant aren't enough and so people want to go back to the Old Covenant. Forgive me Lord for my frustration with this. We no longer have sacrifices for there has been one sacrifice, once

and for all. The Old Covenant has done its work and now is obsolete. We are now new in Jesus Christ. We don't need the blood of animals for we have Christ. We don't need circumcision because Christ is our circumcision. We don't have the Passover because Christ is our Passover. Now we get to proclaim to people, not the Day of Atonement that's coming but the atonement has been done and there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1).

Look at the beauty of the wineskin. It is so simple for we have been liberated from the teaching complexities of the Old Covenant – ceremonial laws, rituals, types and shadows. All of that has been wrapped up and fulfilled in Christ and now look at the simplicity of the church – Word, prayer, sacraments. We no longer have the bloody signs, circumcision and the Passover. We now have the sprinkling clean of water and the Lord's Supper. See the beauty of it. It's simple, profound and you don't have to come to a national structure to come be a part of it. It moves from culture to culture and nation to nation. It takes people where they are and never leaves them where they are. This isn't a call to invention time but this is a call to implementation time. The structure is no longer a national structure but it's the church of Jesus Christ. The complexity is done away with and simplicity replaces it. We don't make theocracies but we bring the Gospel and the implications of the Gospel from nation to nation.

Old Covenant fasting of mourning is done away with. Don't put that patch on there. It doesn't fit. That's an old wineskin. Now we are in the New Covenant with Gospel clarity, church flexibility, sacramental simplicity, worship simplicity, culture to culture, nation to nation where the Holy Spirit isn't revealed in a place in Jerusalem for you are the temple of the Holy Spirit and He's been poured out within you. You have a Table that's been spread that you have eaten from. Why would we not fast to eat more of it? The hungriest Christians are the ones who have been feeding the most and they want more and more and more. He has given a new wineskin where you have been born again personally and He has given His church.

What is the New Covenant fast? It is very simple. The New Covenant fast is a declaration of humility. I'm a sinner saved by grace. We humble ourselves before the Lord but it's not a fast of unmet expectations. It's a fast of deeper feasting by those who have met the Lord and now want more, by those who know what this world needs and they want to be available and accessible that He would do more through them. It is a fast of affirmation. I have tasted and this infinite water I want to drink with an infinite appetite. This unfathomable bread of Christ I want to eat more and more of. It is a feast in the New Covenant of humiliation – a sinner saved by grace, of affirmation – a saved sinner by grace with the Holy Spirit within me as an ambassador of Christ, and of anticipation for I want Him to come afresh and anew for I want to drink deeper and feast further because I'm homesick. Maybe that is why we're not fasting because we're too much at home here. Maybe this has deceptively become home.

What are the four dynamics where God will pour forth through His church and in His church to the world? All you need to do is read the book of Acts and it's affirmed in church history. The four things are worship, the preaching of the Word, prayer and fasting. By no means have we arrived on worship, Word and prayer but we acknowledge it, don't we? We are perhaps even growing in it. When was the last time you fasted to draw near to God? Lord, I have tasted of you. I'm not only willing to give up right eyes and right hands but I'm willing to give up meals to get closer to You. It's not penance or

mourning. I just more, more and more. I want You to do more in me and through me. I refuse to be satisfied with the status quo. I want to press on. I want to grow deeper. I want to be used more and I'm willing to walk by meals to get closer to You. I'm willing, desirous, and longing to come have more of You to meet me.

When I was pastor at Christ Covenant, every Wednesday night we had choir practice that my wife went to and there was a leadership Bible study that I led. It was always over at 7pm and at 7:15pm on that night I had a regular appointment with my mom and dad. My mom would fix my favorite meal – lightly floured, pan fried cube steak with grits. Nobody made it like my mother until my wife started making it. Every Wednesday I could count on that meal. I can't remember a time that I would say "I can't believe I have to go over and eat that again." I even made sure I ate less during that day so I wouldn't feel guilty for eating as much as possible when I got there that night. That's what happens when you taste of Jesus.

He came not only 2,000 years ago but He came to you and you have tasted of Him. Now in fasting you're saying to Him more, more, more to me and through me. Jesus, You're not my weekly snack to get through life. You are my life. Even the good gifts of food and drink I would not put before You, in fact I'll walk by them to spend even more time with You. I long for the fast of anticipation of humiliation and drinking deeper in anticipation of what You will do to me and through me. I want to meet You unfettered, unhindered. I want You! Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, the Old Covenant fast just won't fit but it's not because we don't fast. It's because we fast in a New Covenant of triumphant of hunger of deeper, not unmet expectations, but deeper desires of our expectations and a deeper desire to fulfill what needs to be done until the Bridegroom comes again and then that's the Gospel to our nation and to all the nations. So God make us worshippers. Make us love the preaching of the Word. Make us love O God, deeply to commune with You in prayer. Father, as Your church has whenever You moved to them, in them and through them, we will join that with New Covenant fasting of affirmation and anticipation. It's not the fasting to feast more on Jesus but some of you reading this today need to come to the Feast, Jesus. Fasting is not a penance you do for God to love you, you come to the Feast right now. Say, "Jesus I come, I long to eat and drink of Your glorious grace. I join Your bride, the church of Jesus Christ in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, being gathered from all nations. I rejoice." Father, for those who know You, would You please place upon our heart, would there be a weekly covenant fast or monthly for You? I know not what You'll lead us to but I know what You've led me to do. I do ask that we would not neglect the New Covenant fast while You're away but it would be joined with worship, prayer, and the Word because You not only made things new but You are making all things new. Keep growing us deeper and use us. This nation needs a worshipping, preaching, praying, fasting church and believers, I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.