

**“...getting to Jesus.”**

- Matthew 9:14-26

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**Matthew 9:14-26** *Then the disciples of John came to Him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Your disciples do not fast?" And Jesus said to them, "Can the friends 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. "No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and the tear is made worse. "Nor do they put new wine into old wineskins, or else the wineskins break, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But they put new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved." While He spoke these things to them, behold, a ruler came and worshiped Him, saying, "My daughter has just died, but come and lay Your hand on her and she will live." So Jesus arose and followed him, and so did His disciples. And suddenly, a woman who had a flow of blood for twelve years came from behind and touched the hem of His garment. For she said to herself, "If only I may touch His garment, I shall be made well." But Jesus turned around, and when He saw her He said, "Be of good cheer, daughter; your faith has made you well." And the woman was made well from that hour. When Jesus came into the ruler's house, and saw the flute players and the noisy crowd wailing, He said to them, "Make room, for the girl is not dead, but sleeping." And they ridiculed Him. But when the crowd was put outside, He went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose. And the report of this went out into all that land.*

**It seemed that wherever Jesus ventured,** He rattled the religious establishment. No matter from which tradition one hailed, no matter a person's denominational persuasion, Jesus still seemed to shake them up. In many ways He was the antithesis of religious course, the constant challenge to the status quo, the "re-direct" which pointed away from pious dogma and *toward* interactive relationship. Not just the cliché "*personal relationship with God*" ... a phrase found nowhere in scripture and that in fact most often just means an *adjustable* relationship with God. One where I can operate a spiritual "dimmer switch" to adjust the level of discipleship to a "comfortable level."

No, our relationship interaction is innately and biblically a 'group relate' ... a corporate participation, and that 'bar' of spiritual manifest is firmly and forever set by the example of the life of Christ. Indeed my relationship is deeply 'personal' in as such means I am personally responsible and individually initiating, but the bottom line is my Christian life is to be lived out in a local community of believers and my gifting within a corporate body in unity with others. Our direct toward that relationship vertically *and* horizontally is uniquely and intrinsically by the hand of Jesus. Faith therefore is, by His design, more than just 'church on Sunday.' It's an all-encompassing lifestyle wherein we live now for kingdom pursuit and His glory!

There were then as there are now, folks who were lost in the elements of religion...the orthodoxy and trappings of church, yet had failed to come to a real understanding of what it meant to BE rather than just DO. There were those who knew the rules...they knew through which hoops to jump to fulfill their quota. But they had not come to know God in a "walk beside me" kind of way. These folks, both then and now, bristle when they see people walk in grace and freedom. Such is more than an enigma to them, it often actually *irritates* them!

**"Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?"**

We cannot hear the verbal tone in which the question was asked, but if history bears it out, and the choice of words tells us anything, I cannot help but believe that there was at least a touch of inner angst here! These boys were coming from... *by their own words*...the position of 'fasting *often*.' I can't help but hear perhaps a private subliminal voice beneath the public voice saying "...so what's the deal? We're over here doing all the stuff we are supposed to be doing, and you guys aren't? How do you guys get away with that?"

Jesus briefly acknowledges that the 'day of fasting' for *His* disciples would indeed come, but communion was at this time more crucial than contrition and duty. Yet it was what He would say next that perhaps comes across as somewhat out of context. But Jesus hadn't changed the subject. No, He was simply *elaborating* in explanation of the heart behind the difference in the living of *His* apostles in contrast to other religious folks: the deeper answer to the question of "why?"

The fact is...both then and through every age since then, there will always be those who 'get stuck.' Those who can contextualize the walk of faith and can recite from memory the rules and regulations...the "do's and don'ts", but they seem to be unable to grasp the bigger picture. They never move beyond the stiff and mechanical practice of religion and embrace the actual practice of loving Jesus.

Eventually it seems these folks always burn out. Having never found the "point", they invariably fall away in the absence of substance...the lack of meaning behind what they do under the umbrella of faith. Christianity fails to fulfill them. Or in truth, they fail Christianity! But either way, it fails to bring them the peace and purpose that they read about in the introductory flyer. So they 'cash in their chips' and bow out of the game only to 'head it on back' to from where they came before the game even started. What a waste of time! I've seen these folks dump time in the measurement of not just *years* but *decades*! I personally don't have that kind of loose change so I am compelled to get it right the first time!

Jesus paints a picture through story of a new unshrunk patch sewn onto cloth that is already used and worn. Now being an avid 'old school' levi's man, I grasp the picture! When I have a pair of Levi's that are all broke in, they are so soft and comfortable and can just take about anything you throw at them. But one thing they don't take well, is a piece of cloth that is still "young" being sewn onto them. Because the old doesn't play well with the new! The new will move and the old will not and the hole will just tear open wider. In order to patch a hole, one must find some *old* material to sew onto *old* jeans.

Jesus clarifies His analogy with the picture of the foolishness of putting new wine in old wineskins. An old wineskin becomes brittle with age and no longer has the ability to flex with pressure and change. And that new wine is going to ferment, and when it does it is going to blow up if the wineskin doesn't have some "give" left in it!

Understanding this reality is the tightrope walk of the church shepherd. How does one savor the qualities and subtle nuances of a fine classic aged wine at the same table that has paper cups of iced "Boones farm?" How does one manage the needs ...the nuances of the old *and* the new? However, Jesus 'got it.' These boys that were with Him were "new vintage." Every new generation seems to reinvent itself with new techniques and methods, and the Christian world is no different. That doesn't mean we abandon the gospel, or alter what is the inalienable truths of Christ! It just means things *look* different and sometimes *act* different, while maintaining the fundamental and crucial aspects of the faith. Jesus had, and has, the unique ability to roll with the generations and the changes that always come. But few of us are that capable!

It is very important that if you cannot continue to bend, then you must be able to step aside and make room for the next gen believers to find their feet. That's just **love** believer! If we are unwilling then we will just continue to kill off so much of another generation because we want things *our* way...the 'old way', and the new tears the old, and sometimes just simply blows it up! For these boys the issue was fasting, and for those before *me* it was hymns, Sunday evening church, suits and ties, and Sunday School. But there is a new gen of believers out there with piercings, tat's, 'christian' rap, bible studies in pubs, and radical missional lifestyles! So believer, step up or step back because they're coming through!

I wonder what this says about *this* church and OUR days ahead? Will we embrace the future or hide in the wine-cellar and grow old? What will it take to keep us focused and pliable?

As Jesus was speaking these things, "Example A" approaches stage left. A man came to Jesus saying that his daughter had just died and was asking that Jesus come and lay hands on her and he believed if Jesus would, the girl would live. On the surface, there was nothing wrong with this request! In fact, it expressed a great faith! One that comes only through years of "aging"...slowly but surely developing an exquisite flavor and great value!

But notice the man's approach. He said to Jesus "*come*..." Jesus didn't complain, and in fact just got up and headed out. But the woman who is entering stage *right* had a much different approach! Hers was rather to *go to Him*. In her mind she was broken and "unclean," unworthy to approach the Messiah. Understanding Jewish culture and history explains her thinking. The language is understood to tactfully tell us that the woman had been menstruating for *12 years*. Try to wrap your mind around that ladies. A twelve year period. She was beaten down and worn out. In that culture she would have been ostracized and isolated. She would not have had communion with others and likely no family or possessions. In fact, she would have been like a leper in her day. Unclean and not welcome.

But this woman was desperate. And out of that desperation she *moved*! There was nothing intrinsically wrong with the man's request for Jesus to "come," but there is a heart behind our approach to Jesus and that heart says so much about who and what we are. It says volumes about whether we are old wine skins or new! It says whether we have become easy and comfortable in age or whether we have remained new, flexible and can still bend. It says whether we are soft and satisfied in our relationship with Jesus or whether we are still hungry and motivated and desirous to be where Jesus is! This woman felt unworthy and longed just to "touch the hem of his garment."

Another of the gospel accounts say something wonderful and staggering. It records that at the moment the woman touched him in the crowd, Jesus stopped, turned and asked "*who just touched me?*" The apostles said "*master...the crowd is pressing up on you, how can you ask 'who touched you?'*" But Jesus replied... "*no, you don't understand...someone touched me, and I know it because the 'power' just left me.*" Wow. That's an awesome thing there that I do not wholly understand but as long as I always experience the affect of it, I will always go to Jesus for that mojo! I pray that I will always be that hungry...that *needing*, and that driven to make my way through the crowd to Jesus.

If there is a difference between these two soul's way to Christ, it would have been in that approach. One wanting Jesus to go with him, and the other came to Jesus. One wanted Jesus to come and do His thing in *his* world, and the other came to where Jesus was working and moving and sought to catch some of the overflow.

Mark and Luke say this man's name was Jairus (Mark 5:22; Luke 8:41). He was the leader of the local synagogue, which was the center of religion in his day. Jairus would have had a lot of responsibility for

supervising worship services, caring for the scrolls, running the daily school, keeping the congregation faithful to the law, distributing alms, administering the care of the building, and finding rabbis to teach on the Sabbath. He would have been a man of great influence in his community and would have had to have been a 'Type A' kind of guy. He was a leader...the kind of guy who gets things done and makes things happen.

Jairus would have known a life of directing others. However, we know that his approach to Jesus was anything but condescending, for scripture presents a humble heart as Jairus **knelt** before Jesus, indicating respect and reverence for Christ. I say that because I in no way want to elude that Jairus was anything but gracious and subservient before Jesus. He was desperate, but was he hungry? He wanted Jesus to *do* something for him, but was he coming to give himself wholly to Christ? To surrender his life? Nothing in the story gives us that picture. The life that Jairus possessed would have fostered the "old wineskin" life of comfort and status-quo. One of religious practices, rules and regulations. Restraint and rigidity would have been the norm.

Jesus had been previously approached by a man of power...a centurion in the military, who remarked to Jesus "*I am a powerful man in this world, but I do not deserve to even have you come under my roof. Just say the word from here and my servant who is sick will be healed.*" That guy grasped the situation! His approach to Christ presented a picture that says he knew the score. Jesus healed the servant "long-distance" so we know He could easily do it! The centurion's heart was also different than this mans.

The woman on the other hand would have been coming from the opposite end of the spectrum. She *was* and *had* nothing. She had no clout, no influence, no comfort and no power over anyone or anything. She was just a lost soul. She was not part of the local tabernacle. No Sabbath services for her! All the religious bureaucracy meant nothing to her. What was "proper" held no sway with her. In fact, she consciously broke the rules getting to Jesus. As a person who was labeled ceremoniously "unclean" she should not have even been in that crowd. She was expected to stay away from all the "good people" and not engage them in anyway.

But she no doubt clandestinely made her way through the crowd. She just *had* to get to Jesus. That's all there was to it! *If I can just get to Him I will be healed*, she thought. If I can just touch his robe, I will be healed! I am reminded of the blind men who in Matthew 20 called out to Jesus from the side of the road. They yelled out to Christ...who they could not even see, because they had nothing to lose. There was no consideration of what was proper or what the religious rules of etiquette were. They just knew two things: *they were blind and Jesus could fix it*. So they yelled out above the crowd. The people tried to get them to shut up, but it just made them yell all the louder! They were not hampered by decorum and protocol. They just had to get to Jesus...

And then in Luke 17 there were the ten lepers who saw Jesus coming by but would have been held back by the rules that say a leper cannot approach a non-leper. The ten would have been stoned to death had they tried to break out of the crowd and make a run for Him. So they yelled. They just yelled with all their might... "**Jesus, help us...!**" And Jesus healed all of them on the spot and told them to all go and prove their healing to the local priest. But **one**...ahhh, there is always that one like this woman, realizing he was healed, he turned and praised God loudly and fell on his face at the feet of Jesus. "*Where are the other 9,*" Jesus asked? They're out of here! But the one guy...an outcast Samaritan, came back to the feet of Jesus, because he no doubt understood clearly that he was nothing and Jesus was His only hope.

May we as individuals and as a church always strive to be the unshrunk cloth...the new wineskin, the ones who ...understanding we are nothing, will always seek to get to Jesus...to just touch the hem of his robe. And may we forever be a people that does everything in our power to get the hungry people to Jesus. They are the ones

that are blind and leprous...standing along the road...outside of the crowd, shouting to Jesus... Those who are sneaking through the crowd trying to get to the one who can heal. They are *us*...