

Jesus is the Source of... Fulfillment
Matthew 9:14-17

In his day, during his ministry, Jesus was an encourager, he was a reformer, he was a revolutionary, but he was also controversial. As much as people were touched deeply by his message, there were also many who were perplexed by it, especially who he claimed to be. Several months ago when we were studying the Sermon on the Mount, we found Jesus had addressed this topic of fasting (Matthew 6:16-18). In a very similar way, Jesus provides insight for John's disciples regarding fasting.

For those of Jesus' day under the laws of the Old Testament, regular fasting was not commanded. Since fasting was not commanded for the whole of Israel it was, and still is, a personal choice, a means of drawing closer to God – a spiritual discipline. Represented in Jesus' conversation are those who are seeking further fulfillment in their relationship with God and those who are presently receiving it.

In this passage we are studying, we find a contrast between those who fast. John's disciples were voluntarily fasting, but their fast was rooted in the mindset of not necessarily finding favor with God, but earning it. During the days of the Old Testament people were to use the law to draw them closer to God, but most used it to ensure favor with God. It was what they could do instead of what God had already done. God already loved them enough to offer them grace, but many used that law, God's commands for holy living, to ensure their salvation and not necessarily to draw closer to the heart of God. This is not the desire of God for His people. He doesn't want children who only do what He asks them to do to ensure passage to heaven, but he wants children who are going to love Him with their whole heart. When it came to spiritual offerings of his people God said, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings" (Hosea 6:6, NIV). Even the required sacrifices were not what God truly desired, it's the heart, a close and ever growing relationship with Him. At the core, this is what John's disciples wanted. They wanted to the Messiah. In their mind, making themselves more "holy" in the eyes of God through spiritual disciplines like fasting would usher in the age of the Messiah. They were using fasting as a means of growing in favor with God to get what they wanted, but what they didn't realize was that God was already close in the person of Jesus, God in the flesh. John's disciples were trying to obtain that in which Jesus' disciples already had, and

what they had was fulfillment in God through their genuine relationship with Jesus.

Jesus's disciples were as blessed as they could be in their persistent presence of Jesus in their lives. That's what Jesus was trying to get John's disciples to take a hold of: finding him as the source of fulfillment in their lives. Through his parables, that of the new cloth on an old garment and the new wine in old wineskins, he tried to convince them that their ways of thinking about the presence of God in their lives was changing and that they needed to change with it. God's presence and his favor is not to be obtained by one's own merit, but a gift given by God to those who seek to find fulfillment in His efforts because ours could never measure up. Ephesians 2:8 reminds us, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God" (NIV).

John's disciples were confused by the fulfillment Jesus' disciples had in their lives, but they could easily have the same. They needed to trade their old way of thinking for the new, religion for faith in Jesus.

Where are we today? Are we desperately seeking to find fulfillment in God, maybe trying all we can do to feel satisfied but we can't? Maybe we see others who are reaping the benefits of an active relationship with Christ but for us it seems to be out of our reach? Look today to Jesus. Allow him to alter your way of thinking, accept his grace, receive his mercy – a free gift to you.