

**What Kind of Man Is This? Lord of the Future**  
**From the Series, “The King and I – Matthew Tells Us About the King of the Universe”**  
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**Introduction**

We’re going to start today by looking at some cave paintings. We’ve all seen pictures of these since elementary school. Cave paintings tell us things about *the past*. They represent life long ago - Sometimes tens of thousands of years.

The artists wanted to represent things they saw in their lives. What kind of things did people do in those days? Often times, they hunted. In that case, we see pictures of animals and people with spears.

Most of these paintings have something in common: They describe daily things in the lives of our ancestors. As such, they’re informative and interesting. But normally, they’re not *lifechanging*. It doesn’t surprise us that cave people hunted for a living.

Every now and then though, we run into a cave painting that represents something big. We see one in the illustration on this page. It was discovered in a cave in Indonesia and is thought to be more than thirty-thousand years old. In this painting, we simply see some hands. But these are not just any hands. These hands are doing something unique - Something special. These hands represent a major change in civilization.



Imagine the scene: Thirty-thousand years ago some cavemen are sitting around a fire. They’re discussing a problem they’re facing. Someone makes a suggestion about handling the problem. Then, a few people raise their hands - These hands. A man stands up in this midst of that gathering of early humanity. For the first time in all of human history, the person utters the following immortal words: *“But, we’ve never done it that way before.”* Everyone knew that this was a first. So, this cave painting was created to commemorate that event.

You’re not buying that, huh? Actually, it’s probably some individuals who figured out that they could put their hand against the wall and draw lines around it. So, it is interesting. It was a first of sorts – It’s just not earth-shattering.

“We’ve never done it that way before.” In modern days, we hear those words quite often. They represent old thinking. Sometimes, old thinking is good. But sometimes, not so much. We’re going to read a story today where old thinking was decidedly bad.

We’re in our series, “The King and I – Matthew Tells Us About the King of the Universe.” We’re learning about Jesus by working our way through Matthew’s book about his life. We’re in a sub-series entitled, “What Kind of Man Is This?” Today, we’re going to learn that Jesus is: “Lord of the Future.” Let’s read about it.

## **I. John’s disciples have a question.**

The first thing we’re going to see is that John’s disciples have a question.

14 Then John’s disciples came and asked him, “How is it that we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?” (Mathew 9:14)

Let’s recall the context. In our last session, Jesus called Matthew to follow him - And Matthew did. After accepting the invitation to follow Jesus, Matthew invited Jesus and his disciples to his home. Matthew, we learned was a tax collector. If someone chose to be a tax collector in those days, it’s because it was a way to make a lot of money. Because of this, Matthew probably lived in a home that was comparatively expensive. When they arrived at his home, Matthew hosted a big dinner and invited all his friends. Matthew’s circle of friends was made up of other tax collectors. Because most of the people at the party made good money, they could afford good food and drink, and lots of it - Maybe some music, too?

Also, at the party were some of the disciples of John the Baptist. Let’s compare what John’s followers saw at the party with the way that John the Baptist lived:

1 In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea  
4 John’s clothes were made of camel’s hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. (Matthew 3:1, 4)

So we see that John the Baptist lived out in the wilderness. That means, he had no beautiful home. He wore clothes made out of camel’s hair. In another place, Jesus tells us that this was not an expensive, comfortable outfit (Matthew 11:8). When John eats, he eats very simple fare. His protein comes from locusts, the only kosher insect. In other words, John ate bugs. There was no refrigeration in those days, so John and his friends had to hunt around every day for fresh bugs to eat.

Apparently, locusts don’t taste all that good by themselves. John and others like him made the bugs edible by dipping them wild honey. Understand, if you were out in the wilderness you didn’t go to the store and buy a jar of honey. This is not “Winnie the Pooh.” You had to hunt

around to find honey. Along the way, you probably had to shoo away some bees. If you didn't shoo them correctly, you might get bitten.

So, John:

- Lived outside in the wilderness.
- Wore cheap, not-terribly comfortable clothing
- And ate simple food that he had to search for every day.

If you were one of his followers, you likely did the same.

Because of this, we can assume that when John's followers looked at the party in Matthew's home, they had a "what's wrong with this picture" moment.

- Matthew lived in an expensive home.
- Matthew and his friends all wore expensive, comfortable clothing.
- They ate the best food available, and lots of it.

To make things even more interesting, John taught his disciples to fast. To fast, of course, is to give up eating for a while. Now, we know that Jesus had a lot of problems with the Pharisees. Likely, John did, too. But one thing the Pharisees and John had in common was fasting. All of this adds up to confusion for John's followers. So, they ask: "How is it that we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast? (Matthew 9:14)" Notice, not only do John's followers and the Pharisees fast, but they fast often. We're not sure about John's disciples, but many of the Pharisees would fast at least one or two days a week.

Jesus will give an answer to this question in three parts. Before we look at the answer, let's make a point: Jesus saw John's followers as legitimate. The Pharisees didn't like Jesus, and it showed when they asked questions. When they asked questions, most times they were not looking for answers. They were just trying to make Jesus trip up. John's followers, on the other hand were sincere. Because of that, Jesus will give them a friendly answer.

If Jesus didn't like these men, he could have started by embarrassing them. He could have started by asking the following question: "Before I answer that, tell me: Why do you fast?" If Jesus had done that, I'm suspicious that he would have received a lot of blank looks. At some point, someone would have had to admit something: "Come to think of it – we don't really know. We've just always fasted." In other words, "***We've always done things that way.***"

From that point on, the men could have tried to guess at why they fasted. But instead of wasting time, and instead of embarrassing these sincere but uninformed men, Jesus gives them the answer they need. Again, the answer has three parts. Each part contains a picture.

- First, a groom and his wedding party.
- Next, an old garment that needs a patch.
- Finally, new wine and old wineskins.

## Picture 1: A Groom and His Wedding Guests

Let's take a look at these three pictures. First, we see a picture from a wedding:

- A groom and his wedding guests.

15 Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast. (Matthew 9:15)

I love weddings, don't you? They're beautiful. As a minister, it's even more of a joy because you get to stand up front with the couple. If the only things that happened at a typical wedding was the ceremony, weddings would still be wonderful. But as you know, there's often more. There's the celebration! There's music. There are festivities. And of course, there's food.

In the days of ancient Israel, here's how weddings worked: The bride and the groom became engaged. This involved a small ceremony. The groom had the responsibility of preparing a home for his new family. So, he went off. It might be a month. It might be several months. It might be longer. Along with preparing a home, the groom also prepared the wedding celebration. When it was time, the groom would grab some of his best friends and return for his bride.

After the engagement, the bride went back to her home. Her job was to wait. She was to be ready, because the groom could come at any time. All she had to do was to be ready

Remember, Jesus is talking to followers of John the Baptist, so he's creating an illustration tailor made for them. John told all his followers that his job was to prepare people for the arrival of the Messiah. Everyone in Israel waited for centuries for that day. And guess what? The Messiah came! And he was Jesus.

So, the time during which Jesus walked the earth could be compared to a wedding. Technically, it all should have been a big celebration. In actuality, Matthew was doing exactly what he should be doing. The Messiah came, so he celebrated with a big party!

So, what is Jesus saying to John's followers? ***He's telling them that they're living in the past.*** He's telling them that they haven't thought about what's happening around them. Jesus is the Messiah. Previously, the Messiah had not yet arrived. So, people acted in a certain way. Now, the Messiah is here. Things change when the Messiah is walking the earth.

But there's more. Jesus asked, "How can the guests of the bridegroom ***mourn...***?" How can they mourn when he is with them? The guests of the bridegroom are his friends. Hopefully. In the real world, not always, but let's go with the idea for this illustration. So, if the bridegroom is there, his friends are happy. If the bridegroom is not there, his friends are something less than happy. The further the bridegroom, the more unhappy his friends become. - Until they mourn.

So, the friends of the bridegroom want to be close to him - as close as possible.

## **Fasting**

So now we get to the original question about fasting. The proper way to word the question is not, “why *don’t* you fast?” The proper question is, “Why *do* people fast?” And Jesus tells us, people fast, when they *mourn*.

There are many times recorded in the Bible when people fasted. But you know something? There is only one time in the Old Testament when people were clearly commanded to fast. That was the day of atonement. It was a very special day – one day a year, when Moses told the people to remember their sins. On that day, they were to fast - No food, and no water. They were also supposed to avoid any work. People were to spend an entire day remembering their sins. And for those who seek God, their sins cause them to mourn.

Why? The prophet Isaiah tells us:

... your iniquities have separated you from your God... (Isaiah 59:2)

So, once a year, Moses commanded the people to remember their sin. Sin causes separation from God. Because of that, godly people mourn. And because they mourn, they fast. As an act of grace, the last activity on the day of Atonement was to sacrifice a lamb for the sins of the people. Then, the people could return to their normal lives. Because their sins were forgiven, they could draw close to God again.

At other times, people mourned because they were in danger of some kind. Queen Esther called upon the people of Israel to fast when she learned that they were about to be wiped out. At another time, the prophet Daniel fasted when he learned that the sin of Israel was going to get them into trouble.

So, fasting is appropriate on some occasions. But, something bad happened along the way. Groups like the Pharisees forgot why people should fast. They forgot because they didn’t understand their own sin. They didn’t understand that they should be mourning over their sin. So, to them, fasting became a way to show off. They showed off to other people. Perhaps they thought they were showing off to God. This made their fasting worthless.

The followers of John were different. They were sincere followers of God, but they were misinformed. They didn’t realize that something new had arrived. The words, “We always did it that way before” didn’t cut it. Jesus was warning them to wake up - The Messiah was right there! And, he was going to forgive their sins. So, they could be close to him without any activities like fasting.

On the other hand, this wonderful situation would not last forever.

The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast. (Matthew 9:15)

Imagine that you're attending a wedding. It's beautiful. There's food and celebration. You're having a wonderful time celebrating with the happy couple.

But then, you hear banging on the door. The door opens, and soldiers in riot gear come storming in. They grab the Groom and haul him away. I think there could be some tears if that happened. And that's what happened with Jesus.

Jesus, after suffering and dying, rose again. He went up to his kingdom and told us he would return someday. But in the meantime, it feels like he is distant. And our sin feels close. And sometimes, we're in danger. And so, we may sometimes fast. Not to show off to others or to show off to God, but because we sincerely mourn over our sin. We mourn over our sin and the effect it has on our lives and on our world. And we fast because it helps to draw close to God at times when he feels distant.

So, the followers of John asked why Jesus and his followers didn't fast. Jesus answered with the first picture: A bridegroom and his guests. Jesus told them that fasting had to do with mourning. Mourning is what you do when you are far from God. There's a hint here. God is close to those men. Why? Because Jesus, the Messiah is God.

Something very different was happening, and Jesus wanted John's followers to know it.

But Jesus has more to share. Let's look at the second picture.

### **An Old Garment That Needs a Patch**

Jesus painted a picture of an old garment that needs a patch. Let's read about that:

16 "No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. (Matthew 9:16)

In our modern world, most people own more than one outfit. In the days of ancient Israel, most folks were happy if they had one. You had one outfit, so you had to take care of it. If you were lucky, you might start with a new outfit. But over time, your garment gets old.

So, let's say you tripped and fell, and you got a tear in your outfit. You pulled out the needle and thread, and you tried to fix it. If the tear was really bad, you might need a patch.

But now, you have a problem. The materials of that day tended to shrink. So, if you started with a patch made from new material, eventually, it would shrink, too. And you have a worse tear than when you started.

Apparently, this was common knowledge in those days. Jesus didn't have much explaining to do.

Notice, Jesus is using the word, "old". The implication is, there is "old" and "new." If you try to mix them, bad things happen.

What does this have to do with fasting? Fasting was just one instance of things going wrong. The Pharisees had all kinds of traditions that perverted the teachings of the Scriptures. Previously, Jesus was very clear about his mission. He was not getting rid of old things **that were correct**.

17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. (Mathew 5:17)

So, Jesus isn't telling his followers to throw out everything that's old. Just the opposite -. He's telling them to make sure they understand the original mission of Israel. They were the people who would teach the world about God. And following God has nothing to do with the bad traditions of the Pharisees. Later, the apostle Paul explained this to his friends who lived in Rome:

Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. 2 For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. 3 Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. 4 Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. (Romans 10:1-4)

Paul was sad for his fellow Israelites. They were zealous, he said, but they weren't doing things the right way. They were trying to create their own righteousness by their works. So, when they fasted, they thought they were doing it to create their own righteousness. Paul says, "no!" Something new has arrived. "Christ is the culmination of the law."

I often remind people of what Paul said in the book of Ephesians:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

So, Jesus is saying, you must work to understand the truth that God gave in the past. You must then understand what God is doing in the present. Then, you have something to carry into the future. If you mix old, unscriptural traditions with the truth of the Word, you're going to have a mess. Everything will be torn apart. So, if you're going to fast, make sure you understand why.

To drive this home even further, Jesus gives us one more picture: A picture of wineskins.

### **Picture Three: New wine and old wineskins.**

Neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved.” (Matthew 9:17)

In the old days, there were two ways to store wine. You could put it into jars. That was great if you didn't have to move the jars, but jars were heavy. If you had to travel with the wine, the best way store it was to use wineskins.

New wine produces gases because it's still fermenting. So, you want to put it into something that's going to stretch - Something like a new bag made out of fresh leather.

Leather bags were expensive, so it would be tempting to try to re-use the leather bag once the wine was finished. But by then, the leather got hard. Because the bag couldn't stretch anymore, putting fresh wine into an old bag would result in an explosion. You would lose both the bag and the wine, again, both of which were very expensive. If you want to reuse a leather bag, maybe you can do so with water? Just not wine.

So, once again, Jesus is warning John's followers (and his own) to make sure they understand what's going on. Mixing human traditions with the truth of the Scriptures will get you into a mess.

### **III. What does this mean for us today?**

Now that we understand what was going on, let's ask: What does this mean for us today? As always, it means lot of things. But let's center on a few. I think most of all we have to ask: ***Do we understand what we're doing?***

John's disciples were very sincere, but when you really get down to it, they didn't know what they were doing. They were fasting, which is a hard thing to do. But they didn't know why they were doing it.

The Pharisees fasted. In their case, their motives were totally wrong. So, fasting became one of many things that caused them to be misled. They thought they were earning righteousness. In fact, they were moving further from God every day they lived.

How about us? Let's use an easy example. A few years back, our church refurbished the sanctuary. That included painting the walls and installing new carpets. We had to move a lot of things out before we started and then put them back when we were finished. When we were putting things back, one of the items was a "Christian Flag."

Now, being a minister with some training in church history, I knew why some people might want a Christian flag. However, when I asked around, no one else knew why we had one. Let's just say for now that we didn't need one in our church, so I suggested we put it into storage rather than put it back on display. One person raised their hand and said, "But we've always had it. Will people get upset if we don't put it back?" I said, "Let's find out."

It's been more than five years, and no one has complained. That's a good example of "We always did it that way." Here was something prominently displayed in the sanctuary that added nothing to our worship service.

We could move on to all kinds of things that would be more controversial. However, the list could get very long. So let's do this: We'll run into these things as we work our way through the Scripture. When we do, let's just call them "Wineskin Stuff". For, now, let's say that we need to be constantly aware of why we're doing things.

Let's pull this all together.

## **Conclusion**

The words, "We've never done it that way" don't cut it in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We must understand the truth of God that we learn in the Scriptures. The truth that God gave us in the past. We must be aware of our present world. We must apply the ancient truths to the lives of people today.

We must be willing to look at every detail of our ministry. And we must be ruthless in removing things that don't have any purpose - No matter how good they make us feel.

We must understand the past. We must apply it to the present. We must remove anything that doesn't fit. Then, and only then will be able to move with confidence into the future.

Why do we want to move into the future? Because our Lord Jesus Christ is Lord of the future.

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**Thanks for reading! Here are some helpful links:**

Trinity Church  
[www.TrinityTeaneck.org](http://www.TrinityTeaneck.org)

Phil's Site  
[PhilBrainerd.com](http://PhilBrainerd.com)

To learn how to begin a new life with Jesus Christ, visit Billy Graham's site:

[PeaceWithGod.net](http://PeaceWithGod.net)

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