

A New Kingdom

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[0 : 0 0] well last year I flew to Sydney to marry a couple of people from my old church to perform their wedding not to marry them myself their names are Emma and Rafe they are a very nice couple however when it came to the vows particularly Emma's vows instead of saying I Emma take you Rafe to be my husband Emma actually said I Emma take you William to be my husband needless to say there was a bit of a gasp in the room Emma paused and with everyone looking she turned to me and said what did I just say William now before you think it was a name of another boyfriend it wasn't it was actually Rafe's middle name she was just so nervous she got flustered and said instead of saying Rafe William Britain she just said William and so it wasn't that big a deal we just started again and this time she got it right and soon I was able to pronounce them husband and wife but here's the point of the story the moment I pronounced them husband and wife there was something new in their relationship they were still Emma and Rafe but they were now also husband and wife it was a new era in their relationship if you like and it came with a new way of relating to one another now today as we continue our series through the book of Matthew we'll see that with the arrival of Jesus comes the arrival of something new there is a new era or age in God's kingdom and it comes with a new way of relating to God in the kingdom and they are essentially the two points of our passage today now let me show you from your Bible so we're at point one a new era in the kingdom verse 14 then John's disciples came and asked how is it that we and the Pharisees fast often but your disciples do not fast Jesus answered how can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them though the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them then they will mourn or fast now to really understand what's going on here we need to realize three things that have Old Testament background the first is that fasting was a sign of mourning as Jesus's answer tells us in verse 15 and it was often associated with mourning over sin in the Old Testament now while God only commanded one fast in the

Old Testament the day of atonement ever since the Jews were judged because of their sin and sent into exile they instituted other fast days to show that they were truly sorry for their nation's sin that had led them to exile and foreign rule in fact the Pharisees we're told in the gospels fasted twice every week and the hope it seems was that if they continued to fast and mourn over their nation's sin then God would re-establish his kingdom he would kick out the Romans and free them from foreign rule and re-establish his kingdom on earth just as he seemed to promise in the Old Testament prophets he would finally bring full forgiveness and restore or make new the relationship between him and his people so that's the first thing to realize the second thing we need to realize is that God speaks of his relationship with his people in terms of a marriage it's one of the metaphors he uses and we saw this from our first reading where Israel is like a wife who has an affair and chases after other men and it is quite stark language to remind us of how grievous Israel's sin was God had provided all this stuff new wine and grain and then they worshipped Baal instead for it for God it was like a wife going off and having affair with other lovers as Hosea 2 says she went after her lovers but me she forgot and so after 400 years of warnings God judges her for it by sending them into exile yet because God still loved his people he promised to one day restore or to make new their marriage relationship in Hosea 2 there's a change in tone which joy picked up beautifully it changes which God says therefore I'm actually going to allure her back despite her stubborn heart and her willful sin I want to bring her back and in that day you will call me husband I will betroth you forever he says in Hosea or take on the next slide from Isaiah 54 it says the Lord will call you back as if you were a wife deserted and distressed in spirit a wife who married young only to be rejected says your God rejected because of sin persistent sin for a brief moment I abandon you but with deep compassion I will bring you back in a surge of anger I hid my face for you for a moment but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you says the Lord your redeemer you see there's this metaphor of husband and wife going on or take Isaiah 62 on the next slide

God says to the people of Jerusalem as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride so will your God on that day rejoice over you you see this new era of restored relationship is spoken of in terms of a restored marriage where God is like the bridegroom and his people like the bride and so for Jesus to call himself the bridegroom here in Matthew chapter 9 is to call himself a God who has come to restore the relationship and to make it new again and so first fasting and mourning go together in the hope that there will be a new era and that new era is spoken of in terms of a restored marriage or a new relationship and the third thing we need to realize is that when this happens God promised it would also be a time of great joy new wine celebration the things you might find at a wedding reception so for example in Jeremiah 33 on the next slide we read this is what the Lord says you say about this place it is a desolate waste without men or animals yet in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem that are deserted inhabited by neither men nor animals there will be heard once more the sounds of joy and gladness the voices of bride and bridegroom and the voices of those who bring thank offerings to the house of the Lord saying give thanks the Lord Almighty for the Lord's for the Lord is good his love endures forever for I will restore the fortunes of this land as they were before says the Lord it's going to be a time of celebration you see when this new era of God's kingdom comes when the relationship is restored or from the next slide in from Amos chapter 9 it says the days are coming declares the Lord when the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman and the planter by the one treading grapes new wine will drip from the mountains and flow from all the hills I will bring back my exiled people Israel so what Jesus is saying here in Matthew chapter 9 is that this new era of God's kingdom has arrived he is the bridegroom God the son who has come to restore his relationship with his people and to make it new again by forgiving sins of his people you see it's it's no accident that immediately before this incident we have the story of Jesus healing the paralytic do you remember from last week just before Jesus calls himself the bridegroom here we saw last week that Jesus called himself the son of man who has authority to forgive sins indeed as we saw last week has come to call sinners back to God to restore the relationship they go they go together and so he is calling himself the bridegroom to indicate that he has come to forgive and make new the relationship between God and his people to betroth them to God by bringing ongoing forgiveness to bring in the new era of God's kingdom and with it celebration not mourning

Michelle's grandfather was married for one week before he was shipped off during the second world war to fight and while he wrote letters to Michelle's grandmother promising he would return Michelle's grandmother was not sure and who would be it was war and so being a Christian woman she prayed for him regularly mourned for his absence longed for his return I'm not sure she literally fasted though there was a food shortage with their food stamps and so on but it was as though she mourned and fasted for his return and when he did return it was no longer a time of mourning and fasting it's inappropriate isn't it it was a time of great joy and celebration for his arrival home meant they could actually enter into their new era of husband and wife and enjoy their new relationship together well so too with Jesus his arrival to his people meant the new era of God's kingdom had come where there would be forgiveness and a new relationship between God and his people where God would betroth them again it's as though Jesus is saying how can the wedding guests mourn like this like you Pharisees and John's disciples are mourning and fasting we're not at a funeral where people mourn the loss of a relationship no rather we're at a wedding banquet which celebrates a new relationship for I've come to forgive sins and create a new relationship between God and people it's no time for national mourning and fasting but for celebration says Jesus though

Jesus does add at the end of verse 15 that there would be a time when they would in fact fast and mourn and that would happen when Jesus is taken it says from them which I think is a pretty clear reference to being taken from amongst them and crucified on the cross to pay for our sins so that we could be forgiven in other words there was a right time to mourn but also a right time to rejoice now was the right time for rejoicing for Jesus the bridegroom has arrived and with him a new era of the kingdom with forgiveness and peace now and the certain hope of glory later but with this new era of the kingdom also came a new way of living in the kingdom a new way of relating to God in the kingdom which no longer fitted the old way and so we're at point two verse 16 Jesus says 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 neither do people pour new wine into old wine skins if they do the skins will burst the wine will run out and the wine skins will be ruined no they pour new wine into new wine skins and both are preserved now in Jesus' day everyone knew that you don't fix a hole in your clothes with a piece of unshrunk cloth because when you wash your garment the new piece of unshrunk cloth will shrink and pull away from the garment modern equivalent one lesson that I learnt was you don't put coloured clothes with your white clothes

[12 : 37] I learnt that very early on when I pulled out a pink t-shirt and everyone in Jesus' day also knew that you don't put new wine into old wine skins because the old wine skin is brittle it's lost its elasticity and so when the new wine ferments and lets off fermenting gases it will stretch the old wine skin but because it's brittle and it's not elastic then it will burst and the point he is making is that the new way of relating to God through Jesus will not fit with the old way of Judaism the new way of forgiveness in Jesus does not fit with the old way of national fasting and mourning to bring on forgiveness indeed the new way of relating to God through Jesus cannot fit into the old way of Judaism you know with its sacrifices and priests and fasting and so on why?

because Jesus replaces them he doesn't just he doesn't fit into them but he removes them and then puts himself in their place you see the old way did not work because it did not fully deal with people's sin permanently the people needed a better sacrifice a better priest a transformed heart that would genuinely love God and this is what Jesus brings he replaced sacrifices with himself and became the better sacrifice at the cross dealt with sins once and for all he replaced the priesthood and became a better priest at his resurrection because he always lives to intercede for us and he also gave his spirit who transforms our heart you see Jesus is saying that this new era of God's kingdom comes with a new way of relating to God and that new way replaces the old it doesn't fit with it any more than a new piece of unshrunk cloth fits with an old garment when Michelle and I got married we entered into a new era in our own relationship you know from boyfriend and girlfriend to husband and wife now there were still some things that stayed the same just like there are things that stay the same in the kingdom of God you know

I'm still Andrew she's still Michelle I'm still the funny one she she's still the patient one but with the new era in our relationship it came a new way of relating to God sorry to relating to each other no longer did we live at our parents homes but we came together and lived in our own home and no longer did I get dressed up to take Michelle out on dates but now I just shouted her an instant coffee I know I'm not supposed to always do that but there was a change I could be more relaxed I let down our guard and so on you see with this new era in our relationship came a new way of living in it which replaced the old and it's the same here with a new era in God's kingdom came a new way of living in God's kingdom a new way of relating to God and it did not fit with the old way but it replaced it and that new way is Jesus himself and so no longer are the Jews to relate to God through rituals like national fasting and sacrifices and so on that God instituted to teach them no longer are they to relate especially through the extra rituals that they themselves added rather now they are to relate to God through Jesus indeed they are to live for God through Jesus trusting in him following him becoming like him and that brings us to our final point point three how are we relating to Jesus the bridegroom the first question is do we believe in him or trust in him

I mean there is no other way to relate to God if the Jews could no longer relate to God through their old ways many of which God had actually given them then we can certainly not relate to God through any old way we choose I was with a family recently where one of their loved ones was dying and the topic of heaven and God came up I guess with a minister there it's hard to avoid but one family member mentioned I can't remember their exact words but they expressed that familiar sentiment that all roads surely lead to God it doesn't really matter does it which religion you follow you'll still get to heaven but it's not true is it you see if Jesus has replaced Judaism if even Judaism which God gave Israel at one point no longer fits then a completely different religion will certainly not fit you know if Jesus is the bridegroom who brings this new era of God's kingdom where God promised to make our relationship with him new again where he promised forgiveness and peace and joy now with a certain hope of glory later if Jesus is the one who brings all this then it's only Jesus we can go to in order to relate to God so I gently replied to this family member with a Bible reading that in God's sovereignty the person dying had already chosen and I said well I guess

I believe the Bible which says and I read out John 14 where Jesus says I am the way the truth and the life no one comes to the Father except through me and so again the first question is do you believe in Jesus you cannot relate to God without coming to Jesus and for us who have then there are two other points of application the first is do we continue to rejoice in this new relationship that Jesus has brought us actually the outline should really read do we continue to rejoice and mourn rightly you see just as there was a right time for the Jews to mourn and a right time to rejoice so too is there for us we are still to mourn at sin like the Jews but unlike the Jews we are to cling to Christ and rejoice in the forgiveness he brings so Paul writes in 2 Corinthians it's not on the screen but just listen he writes godly sorrow mourning brings repentance that leads to salvation there is a place for godly mourning one that leads to repentance and brings salvation and but then he also writes in Romans chapter 5 that we rejoice in God through our Lord

[19 : 25] Jesus Christ through whom we have now received reconciliation new relationship forgiveness and so we are to continue to mourn and rejoice rightly at the right time though sometimes we rejoice and mourn much more over less important things like the tennis Roger Federer is out although tonight it's the final Murray versus Djokovic however you pronounce his name I wonder who's going to win it's going to be an exciting match it'll be great oh I'm at church preaching again you know it'd be so good if I just had Sundays completely off to myself it's easy to start thinking like that isn't it for the record I'm very happy to be here at church both now and tonight but it's very easy to mourn and rejoice over the less important things in life and not to mourn and rejoice over the truly important to mourn over sin and to rejoice in Christ the bridegroom and so it's good to regularly pause and reflect on our lives and think about areas where we may have sinned with our thoughts or words but then to also realise that God will forgive us yet again and help us live like Christ it's why we often have a confession here at church not necessarily to guilt trip us though as I said there's nothing wrong with mourning over sin but so we can also remember the forgiveness we have and rejoice in it one of my favourite verses of scripture is Romans 5 verse 20 which says where sin increased grace increased all the more it's great news isn't it it's worth rejoicing in is it not we're to rejoice and mourn rightly that's the first bit of application for Christians the second bit is this if the Jews were no longer to relate to God through rituals but through Jesus then are we continuing to relate to God not through rituals but through Jesus and we continue to relate to God not just by trusting in Jesus but also following Jesus and becoming like Jesus you see this is how we worship God is by following Jesus this is how we please God by becoming like his son the Lord Jesus and so are we aspiring to be more like our Lord Jesus if you've been at this church for a little while then you would have no doubt heard me tell you stories about my children including my son

Tim and they are not always about something positive he's done so this morning I thought I would tell you something that is positive he asked to say grace last night at dinner time and he began by thanking God for the day being able to play basketball in the morning even though they lost again he emphasized again just in case God missed it hint hint nudge nudge God and then he prayed for a few more things including the starting school and so on and thanking God for the new year and just when I thought that this was going to be the longest grace ever he added and please help us to be more like Jesus this year and thank you for this food in Jesus name Amen now apart from finally remembering to thank God for the food the thing that struck me was please help us to be more like Jesus this year you see he got it he got that we are now to relate to God in the kingdom through Jesus not just by trusting him but by living out that trust by following him and becoming like him that is how we worship

God that is how we please God our father and so that's what he prayed and it was a helpful reminder to me because to be honest I could pray that prayer a bit more often for myself for my family for my church family for Jesus the bridegroom has ushered in a new era in God's kingdom where our relationship with God can be made new but with that comes a new way to relate to God in the kingdom and it's all through his son the Lord Jesus trusting in him following him and becoming like him now that's a goal worth having for this year is it not and definitely something worth praying for so let's do that now let's pray our gracious heavenly father we do thank you for the Lord Jesus that although we were like Israel a wife who wandered from her husband you have brought us back and forgiven us through the bridegroom the Lord Jesus

Christ and so father we pray that you would help us to rejoice in this to mourn over our sin but to rejoice in the forgiveness that Jesus brings help us to come to you by believing in Jesus help us to worship you by following the Lord Jesus and help us to please you by becoming like the Lord Jesus we ask all these things in his name amen one one Sz one people over they were