

1050 The call of Matthew, fasting, and Sabbath -The image of Jesus (5) (Verses refer to those in NASB unless otherwise specified, and by Whirlwind.)

We first take a look at the calling of Matthew, who didn't hide that he was a tax collector. We explain why we know that Matthew is also named Levi even though the Bible doesn't say so explicitly. Secondly, we often see Jesus fasting, and the effectiveness of fasting. Although the result of fasting is not necessary at every time up to what we expected, but we should fast if our health condition allows it. Remember that we are justified by faith, not according to the law just by fasting. Thirdly, we'll look at the parable that new and old things cannot really match, which is for fasting. We must understand the true meaning of fasting. Fourthly, we'll take a look at the statement that the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath. Because He is the Lord and is full of compassion, He knew that the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. He indeed did the true meaning of Sabbath, not according to the Law of the timing. As long as we don't quench the Spirit, we naturally fulfill the commandments in the Old Testament.

1. The call of the tax collector Levi who is also named Matthew

The Bible doesn't say explicitly that Levi is also named Matthew. But if we compare the process of the call of Levi with that of Matthew, we know the descriptions are for the same person, but with different names. Jews at that time often had two names. For example, Peter was originally called Simon, and Jesus gave him the name Peter as described in John 1:42, "...Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter)." Of course, there were similar situations in the era of the Old Testament. For example, Abraham was named Abram. As another example, Jacob was given two chances to change his name to Israel by God [1].

The Gospel of Luke says explicitly that it was written according to order. As we discussed previously, we explain why it means the order of events, not necessarily the order of each occurrence in an event. Thus, we'll continue to use the Gospel of Luke to look at the events. Let us look at the call of the tax collector Levi first. In Luke 5:27-32, it says, "After that He went out and noticed a tax collector named Levi sitting in the tax booth, and He said to him, "Follow Me." And he left everything behind, and got up and began to follow Him. And Levi gave a big reception for Him in his house; and there was a great crowd of tax collectors and other people who were reclining at the table with them.

The Pharisees and their scribes began grumbling at His disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with the tax collectors and sinners?" And Jesus answered and said to them, "It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.""

We see that Levi left everything behind, and got up and began to follow Him. This should be our attitudes too. Apparently, the friends of Levi were many tax collectors. We also see that the Pharisees and their scribes were self-righteous. Don't we all start from being sinners? It is said clearly in Romans 3:23, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." A similar statement is also given in Mark 2:14-17, which will not be discussed more.

Let us next see the call of Matthew described in Matthew 9:9-13, "As Jesus went on from there, He saw a man called Matthew, sitting in the tax collector's booth; and He said to him, "Follow Me!" And he got up and followed Him. Then it happened that as Jesus was reclining at the table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were dining with Jesus and His disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to His disciples, "Why is your Teacher eating with the tax collectors and sinners?" But when Jesus heard this, He said, "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire compassion, and not sacrifice,' for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.'" Compared with the description of the Gospel of Luke, we know that they describe the same person but with different names. Thus, Levi is also named Matthew, and we also see the process of his call.

2. The effectiveness of fasting

In Luke 5:33-35, it says, "And they said to Him, "The disciples of John often fast and offer prayers, the disciples of the Pharisees also do the same, but Yours eat and drink." And Jesus said to them, "You cannot make the attendants of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them, can you? But the days will come; and when the bridegroom is taken away from them, then they will fast in those days.'" The bridegroom is Jesus. His body left us now, and we indeed should fast if our health condition allows.

Why do we say that Jesus is the example of fasting and we see His effectiveness too? Let us take a look at the event described in Matthew 17:14-16, "When they came to the crowd, a man came up to Jesus, falling on his knees before Him and saying, "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is a lunatic and is very ill; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water. I brought him to Your disciples, and they could not cure him.'" Although the disciples could heal and cast out demons, they couldn't do anything this time. The person fell on his knees before Him, "And Jesus rebuked him (his son), and the demon came out of him, and the boy was cured at once." He then stated in Matthew 17:21, "[But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.]" He indeed casted out the demon. Thus, we can see that He fasted often during the period of His becoming flesh. Otherwise, He lied. And we all know that Jesus cannot lie, not even a white lie since that is still a lie. What He did is indeed an example for us in fasting.

In fact, fasting is very effective in the era of the New Testament. This can be seen in Acts 13:2-3, "While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away." The body of Jesus indeed left us nowadays, but the great mission has such a promise that Jesus will be with us always. It is said in Matthew 28:18-20, "And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.'" Please notice that the great mission not only preaches the Gospel to others to make them believe but also makes them disciples to walk the way of sanctification. Indeed, His promise is true since it is said in 1 Corinthians 6:19, "Or do you

not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, ..." We have the abiding Holy Spirit. Therefore, the Lord is always with us in the form of the Holy Spirit.

Apparently, the requirement of fasting is the general principle. If fasting is moved by God, it'll be definitely effective. Many witness this nowadays. Fasting motivated by oneself will not necessarily result in what one expects. God has the absolute authority to result in the final decision. One example is given in the Old Testament. David knew his baby born out of adultery was doomed to die, "David therefore inquired of God for the child; and David fasted and went and lay all night on the ground."(2 Samuel 12:16) Despite this, the result was in 2 Samuel 12:18, "Then it happened on the seventh day that the child died. ..." We all know that fasting is not necessary to have results according to what we wish. Under the condition of our health permitted, it is ok to have fasting. Sometimes our health doesn't allow us to fast, how can such a person fast? Will the person not be saved? Absolutely not true. As said clearly in Romans 3:28, "...a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law." What we have to understand is "Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life."(Proverbs 4:23)

3. A parable of old and new things that cannot match

In Luke 5:36-39, it says, "And He was also telling them a parable: "No one tears a piece of cloth from a new garment and puts it on an old garment; otherwise he will both tear the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled out, and the skins will be ruined. But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins. And no one, after drinking old wine wishes for new; for he says, 'The old is good enough. '""

This parable was given for fasting. In the era of the New Testament, the requirement of fasting is different. We don't have to obey the Law, but have to be willing. Although the old wine might be better tasted, we must drink the new Gospel. Matthew 9:14-17 and Mark 2:18-22 also mentioned the same event by adding one fact, "Nor do people put new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wineskins burst, and the wine pours out and the wineskins are ruined; but they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved.""(Matthew 9:17) New wine can cause fermentation, and fermentation can result in the burst. We want to be the new wineskin, and to become a new self "and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth."(Ephesians 4:24) "and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him."(Colossians 3:10)

Don't forget the true meaning of fasting in the Old Testament, "Is this not the fast which I choose, to loosen the bonds of wickedness, To undo the bands of the yoke, And to let the oppressed go free And break every yoke? Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry And bring the homeless poor into the house; When you see the naked, to cover him; And not to hide yourself from your own flesh?"(Isaiah 58:6-7) Doesn't Jesus let the son go free and break every yoke? God is The God Who has mercy and grace.

4. The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath

In Luke 6:1-5, it says, "Now it happened that He was passing through some grainfields on a Sabbath; and His disciples were picking the heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands, and eating the grain. But some of the Pharisees said, "Why do you do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" And Jesus answering them said, "Have you not even read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him, how he entered the house of God, and took and ate the consecrated bread which is not lawful for any to eat except the priests alone, and gave it to his companions?" And He was saying to them, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.'"

Someone may see these verses and think that it is the same event described in 1 Samuel 21:6, "So the priest gave him (David) consecrated bread; for there was no bread there but the bread of the Presence which was removed from before the Lord, in order to put hot bread in its place when it was taken away." But apparently not. What happened in 1 Samuel 21:6 was when David was alone. The event recorded in the Book of Luke happened in what was recorded in Mark 2:23-28 in the time of Abiathar as the high priest. There, it also said, "Jesus said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.'"(Mark 2:27-28) The same event is also recorded in Matthew 12:1-8. Now we only described what is relevant to our discussion. "Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and are innocent? But I say to you that something greater than the temple is here. But if you had known what this means, 'I desire compassion, and not a sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.'"(Matthew 12:5-8)

The Sabbath was made for man, not reverse. What Jesus was concerned for was man, not the Law. He is Lord of the Sabbath, greater than the temple, and is full of compassion. He concerned more that the disciples needed something to eat, and what did was their only choice at that time. It is just like that the priest had no other choice but to give David and his followers the consecrated bread. And it is also like that the priest has to work on Sabbath. All are under the same principle. How can they be sinful?

We now look at the true meaning of Sabbath in Isaiah 58:13-14, "If because of the sabbath, you turn your foot From doing your own pleasure on My holy day, And call the sabbath a delight, the holy day of the Lord honorable, And honor it, desisting from your own ways, From seeking your own pleasure And speaking your own word, Then you will take delight in the Lord, And I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; And I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, For the mouth of the Lord has spoken." You must turn your foot.

Let us take a look at another thing Jesus did in Luke 6:6-11, "On another Sabbath He entered the synagogue and was teaching; and there was a man there whose right hand was withered. The scribes and the Pharisees were watching Him closely to see if He healed on the Sabbath, so that they might find reason to accuse Him. But He knew what they were thinking, and He said to the man with the withered hand, "Get up and come forward!"

And he got up and came forward. And Jesus said to them, "I ask you, is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to destroy it?" After looking around at them all, He said to him, "Stretch out your hand!" And he did so; and his hand was restored. But they themselves were filled with rage, and discussed together what they might do to Jesus." He knew that the scribes and the Pharisees were looking for trouble for Him, but He did what was needed anyway. He knew ahead of time that He would die for us, but He still made the same choice in the Garden of Gethsemane.

The same event is also recorded in Mark 3:1-6, "He entered again into a synagogue; and a man was there whose hand was withered. They were watching Him to see if He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him. He said to the man with the withered hand, "Get up and come forward!" And He said to them, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to kill?" But they kept silent. After looking around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out and immediately began conspiring with the Herodians against Him, as to how they might destroy Him." Although Jesus followed the leading of the Holy Spirit in His whole life, but He on earth is same as us in a way, who have emotions, not like a robot which only follows instructions, one action due to one instruction.

This event is recorded in Matthew 12:10-13 by adding "And He said to them, "What man is there among you who has a sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable then is a man than a sheep! So then, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.""(Matthew 12:11-12) Jesus accomplished the true meaning of Sabbath, not Law of Sabbath.

Reference

[1] The meaning of Israel in the original language is from Genesis 32:28, "He said, "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed."" Someone may think what I thought before that it means the prince of God, but not according to this verse. The exact time of the changing name occurred in Genesis 35:9-10, "Then God appeared to Jacob again when he came from Paddan-aram, and He blessed him. God said to him, "Your name is Jacob; You shall no longer be called Jacob, But Israel shall be your name." Thus He called him Israel." God did give him two opportunities to change his name. Some people thinks the meaning of Israel in Hebrew means 'prince of God,' but it seems not based on the Bible. To my best knowledge, there is no other place mentioning that Israel is the prince of God. In fact, in the era of the New Testament, believers are all the adopted sons of God, and thus the princes of God. "For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings."(Hebrews 2:10)