

Squabbles with Pharisees

Mark 2:13-22

Jesus and New Wine

It's easy for us to forget that Jesus had enemies because he was doing so many good things by healing, preaching, and casting out demons. But we're moving into a section this week and next where he has some issues with the Pharisees.

13 And He went out again by the seashore; and all the people were coming to Him, and He was teaching them.

14 As He passed by, He saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting in the tax booth, and He *said to him, "Follow Me!" And he got up and followed Him.

15 And it *happened that He was reclining at the table in his house, and many tax collectors and sinners were dining with Jesus and His disciples; for there were many of them, and they were following Him. 16 When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that He was eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they said to His disciples, "Why is He eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners?" 17 And hearing this, Jesus *said to them, "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

18 John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting; and they *came and *said to Him, "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?" 19 And Jesus said to them, "While the bridegroom is with them, the attendants of the bridegroom cannot fast, can they? So long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. 20 But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day.

21 "No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; otherwise the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear results. 22 No one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost and the skins as well; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins."

v. 13 After the healing of the paralytic, Jesus goes back to the seashore and begins teaching again. It is a good sign that people are coming to hear him teach and not just do miracles.

v. 14 Jesus and the tax collector.

Levi aka Matthew would have a small booth where he would collect taxes based on the commerce that was conducted in the seaport town.

As you might imagine, Tax Collectors were not well liked among the people. These would be Jewish men who would bid on how much they might raise, and if Rome liked the bid, then they got the job. They had a quota, and anything collected over the quota they could keep. The whole tax system under Rome fostered greed and corruption. (There is nothing new under the sun).

Those who chose such a career would be isolated socially and expelled out of the synagogue. They were viewed as traitors. They were, in a sense, social lepers. But they were also rich.

The renegade Rabbi, Jesus, shocks the crowd by calling Levi to 'follow me.' We can only imagine how the other disciples felt about having this "unclean" man among their number. He was the guy getting rich by over taxing the fishermen.

To make matters worse, Jesus takes his disciples to Levi's house for a meal, and tax collectors and sinners were there for the meal as well, "for there were many of them and they were following him."

*** Jesus was attracted and attractive to sinners.

Can the same be said of us?

OR would we have the response of the Pharisees?

"How is it that He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?"

The Pharisees were named “Pharisees” because they were the separated ones. They were the ones most committed to keeping the law of God. They grew to believe that salvation came from segregation; that is, they segregated themselves and distanced themselves from anybody who was loose in their moral life. So, it was important for them to maintain their holiness and sanctity by having no dealings with people who were sinners.

Scripture tells us not to love the world or be conformed to the world, but if we are going to ‘make disciples of the nations’, we will have to be in the world where things get messy. That is how Jesus did ministry.

V. 17 -WHO NEEDS A PHYSICIAN?

Jesus hearing their comments gives a direct response... “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous but the sinners to repentance.”

Ex: a letter years ago to the Sentinel newspaper in Florida from a lady who worked in a doctor’s office. She wrote a letter saying: “I can’t stand that people who are sick keep coming into the office with their contagious diseases. If they’re sick, they should stay at home.”

Don’t doctors need sick people? A Messiah doesn’t need to spend his time with righteous people. Truly righteous people don’t need a savior. Since there are none who are righteous, we ALL need Jesus Messiah.

** Note that Jesus does not condone sin nor the reality of sinners. He doesn’t try to redefine the sin as something else. He is clear in that he came to call the sinners to repent.

If the Pharisees had truly been righteous they would have believed the word of God – Ps 53 (Rom 3)

There is no one who does good.

2 God has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men

To see if there is anyone who understands,

Who seeks after God.

3 Every one of them has turned aside; together they have become corrupt;

There is no one who does good, not even one.

Had they believed the Word, they would have said, “Jesus, come to my house next for I am sick, for I am a sinner.”

The words of Jesus are a rebuke to the Pharisees, but they are also a challenge to many of us who have been Christians for a long time. It is all too easy to lose the freshness of a relationship with Christ. It is all too easy to see those who are sick as “other” than us.

It’s all too easy to forget that our Covenant relationship with God is a marriage to celebrate, not a burden to bear. Jesus alludes to that in the next section.

v. 18 ff WHEN TO FAST AND WHEN TO FEAST

John was a minimalist who led a life of austere self-discipline and so did his followers.

They and the Pharisees were fasting. We don’t know their exact reason for fasting. The OT LAW OF Moses required fasting on the Day of Atonement, but traditions had developed that some would fast on various occasions or as a sign of repentance.

The Pharisees had a practice of intermittent fasting – sunup to sundown- two days a week. It was a mark of their personal piety.

Jesus was not opposed to the practice of fasting – remember the 40 day fast in the wilderness when he was tempted by Satan. BUT THERE is a time to fast and a time to feast.

He makes the point by referring to a wedding feast, which in that context would last for a week. It was a time to celebrate and feast, not fast.

Jesus breaks new ground in his argument by making himself the bridegroom. In the OT, the bridegroom is God and Israel is the bride. **Isa 62**

4 It will no longer be said to you, "Forsaken,"
Nor to your land will it any longer be said, "Desolate";
But you will be called, "My delight is in her,"
And your land, "Married";
For the Lord delights in you,
And to Him your land will be married.
5 ...And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride,
So your God will rejoice over you.

In the NT, the bridegroom is the Son of God, and the church is His bride. The bridegroom, the King has come in the person of Jesus, so enjoy the feast while he is here. It is time to rejoice. The coming of Jesus brings a new age for the people of God, and the old traditions of the Pharisees – fasting twice a week – are NOT appropriate for the age of the Bridegroom. New forms of piety will replace the old ones since the Bridegroom has come.

Jesus teaches them that the day will come when the bridegroom is gone, and that will be the time to fast. He knows what he is talking about. We know what he is talking about because hindsight is 20/20, but the disciples didn't fully understand.

To amplify or unpack his teaching Jesus gives two illustrations / "parables" (Luke 5) .

21 "No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; otherwise the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear results. 22 No one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost and the skins as well; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins."

v. 21-22 Does that clarify things for you?

HOW are we to understand these illustrations? If we go Occam's Razor, then the two 'parables' are just that, i.e. illustrations to show why it is wrong to expect people to fast when the bridegroom is with them. I like this explanation because it is simple and less complicated – Occam's Razor.

BUT Jesus is not always an Occam's Razor kind of guy, and the extra context from Luke 5 gives a strong hint that something deeper is being said.

THAT SAID, we should be careful to over spiritualize what may be a simple illustration.

**v. 21 – The TROUBLE WITH WINESKINS see Matt 9:14-17; Luke 5:36-39
Luke 5:36 THIS IS A PARABLE**

Honestly, this is a hard passage because there are differing interpretations. One of the first books I read as a new believer was The Problem with Wineskins by Howard Snyder. I was in over my head and really didn't understand it.

Some verses from Luke 5 add a twist to the meaning...Luke 5:36..."he was telling them a parable." And no one pours 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. **38** But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins. **39** And no one, after drinking old wine wants new; for he says, 'The old is fine.'"

WHAT IS THE OLD AND WHAT IS THE NEW?

SUMMARY of views on the two short 'parables' that Jesus uses

It seems clear that the first illustration/parable about the cloth is pretty clear. It is common sense to anyone who has ever mended a garment. The second one about the wine and wineskins seems clear,

especially in a culture where wineskins are common. Yet, there seems to be more going on with the second parable than meets the eye.

View #1 – The Old cloth or wineskin is the old covenant of the “OT” and Jesus is bringing something ‘New’. You can’t mix the new with the old

Problem: This view leans toward a discontinuity between the OT AND THE NT. Biblically, there is a close continuity as Jesus come to fulfill the OT promises.

Jesus is not opposed to the OT. He came to fulfill it. He knows that it contained the ‘gospel preached to Abraham – Gal 3. It contained grace and salvation through a suffering servant Messiah.

There has always been ONE COVENANT OF GRACE. In the coming of Christ, it is not totally NEW, it is RENEWED. It is ‘new’ in quality, but not in essence. Salvation has always been by grace and by faith. Jesus is the ‘new administrator’ of a RENEWED covenant.

VIEW #2 – THE OLD cloth or wineskin is the tradition of the scribes and Pharisees that had replaced the true heart of the OT teaching of righteousness by faith in the grace of God. Jesus isn’t talking about the OT as rightly practiced by Abraham, Moses, David, and the prophets. Jesus is talking about the Judaism of his day that had departed from the gospel preached to Abraham, Moses, etc. The old robe is the Judaism of the day which was one of formalism, outward observance, and false righteousness.

Jesus is Not saying OT is bad and NT is good. Jesus believed the OT.

Old wineskins are the normal way that normal people look at life and God, i.e. works and reward. “Be good and God will reward you. Do bad and you get trouble.”

Jesus doesn’t fit this mold. The scribes should have seen the gospel of grace and faith in OT, but it had been obscured.

Jesus and his grace don’t fit this ‘old way’. Try to put Him in that wineskin and it won’t hold.

Jesus disrupts the paradigm of works with new wine is the way of His mercy and grace.

His won’t fit in the way of the Pharisees and vice versa.

He can’t simply fit in as an add on.

James Edwards:

“He is not an attachment, addition, or appendage to the status quo.” Jesus is not something that you add to an already comfortable Christianity. He’s not something that you make fit into your box and if it will fit then that’s cool. Jesus radically transforms everything. Jesus blows the box up and replaces it with His fullness. We don’t make Jesus conform to us, to our rules, to our Christianity...He conforms us, our rules, our Christianity so that we are transformed.

But we tend to like old wine better unless we’re a paralytic, demonized or a ‘sinner’. They like the new wine.

Those who “have it together” like the old wine. They think things are going well and the system is working for them.

The wine/wineskins of the Pharisees were those of works righteousness. For them, “the old is good”. That’s what they’d been drinking for generations.

The OT gospel that was preached to Abraham – Gal 3:8- had been lost. For the Jews of Jesus’ day, salvation was based on one’s works and personal righteousness.

This should not be hard to believe. We see the same thing in the church age whenever the Grace of God in Christ alone is lost or hidden and then discovered. The Reformation was basically a rediscovery of grace.

And the medieval Roman church thought “the old is good.”

In every age, when the church gets focused on pleasing the culture, the gospel of grace is lost because it is an offense to those who want to trust in human goodness. When the church drinks the self-salvation story

of the current culture, the culture will say, "that is good." Just look at the way whole historic denominations have started drinking the "wine", or spiritual Kool-aid of today's culture. It's nothing to be proud of.

The sense of the Lord's remark is that Jesus' radical message is incompatible with the principles and practices of the Judaism of his day. Two competing principles have collided. Those who are comfortable with the traditional viewpoint are unlikely to welcome Jesus' message, which to them seemed like new wine. That wine simply cannot be contained in the old skins. It is important to remember that Jesus is not talking about the OT as rightly understood or the religion of Moses as practiced by a true believer. As the Lord will say in many ways in the Gospels, Moses' teaching and his teaching were the same, but the Jews of his time had deserted Moses and betrayed the faith of Abraham.

VIEW #3 The Old cloth or wineskin is the proper understanding of the OT, and the NEW cloth/wineskin is the teaching of the Pharisees.

Leake...

Jesus came to fulfill the OT, not blow it up.

The Pharisees had missed the true covenantal relationship with God and replaced it with 'new' practices and teaching. They added all that stuff to guard the law so that we would obey.

They were adding a righteousness of works to the righteousness of faith taught from the time of Abraham.

Had they truly drunk the true OT WINE, then they wouldn't need their new wine of laws and restrictions.

If you really understand the "old wine" then you aren't going to desire this new wine of the Pharisees.

That's one way to take verse Luke 5:39. The gospel is older than the laws of the Pharisees.

But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins. 39 And no one, after drinking old wine wishes for new; for he says, 'The old is good enough.' " Luke 5

Wrap UP

What to make of this???

The varying interpretations lead to the same conclusion...

Any mixing of the OT/NT message of 'righteousness by faith' in God's grace with another cloth or wine of works righteousness will ruin both. Jesus did not seek to mingle or combine the Pharisaic self-righteous way with the gospel preached to Abraham and the gospel of the kingdom that he was preaching.

The good news of the Gospel is always fresh and life giving. Ever since the Garden in Gen 3, the good news of grace has stood against the man centered self-salvation strategy. God provided all that was needed and yet Adam and Eve went their own way. Even then God was gracious and let them live and gave the first promise of a savior to come who would crush the head of the serpent.

Ever since then mankind has tried to throw off the robe of righteousness through faith and sew in the righteousness by works. Jesus would have no part of it.

If you don't see yourself as needing a physician, then the old wine of self-salvation may taste good.

If you have your own version of fasting or other righteous rituals, then you may think the old wine tastes good.

But if you have a right understanding of yourself and God's righteousness, then you'll know that you need the divine physician who brings the 'new wine' of the kingdom of faith and grace.

THE TABLE- The True New Wine is the cup that Jesus initiated at the Last Supper with His disciples. The cup poured out for us which is the new covenant in His blood.

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