

## NEW WINE INTO NEW WINESKINS

Luke 5:33-39

Key Verse: 5:38

“No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins.”

In the last passage we studied Jesus’ calling of Levi the tax collector to be his disciple. Levi seemed to be the most hopeless person because of his selfishness and his irrevocable decision to be a tax collector—a public sinner. But Jesus saw him with the hope of God. Jesus saw that he could be changed into a most sacrificial man of God who would know God’s heart the best. In this hope Jesus called Levi, saying, “Follow me.” And Levi got up, left everything and followed Jesus. Levi followed Jesus until he was changed into St. Matthew, who wrote the Sermon on the Mount. Levi followed Jesus until he entered the kingdom of God to live forever with Jesus. Jesus sees people with hope. In Jesus, any kind of sinner can find new life and new direction to live for the glory of God and be a blessing.

In today’s passage Jesus defends his disciples from the criticism of the religious leaders. Jesus reveals who he is and why he came. Jesus teaches that the main characteristic of Christian life is joy. Most importantly, he teaches us what kind of people can be his disciples. Jesus also exposes the spiritual problem of the Pharisees. May God help us to learn who Jesus really is and how to be his disciples through this study.

First, Jesus is the bridegroom (33-35).

Look at verse 33. “They said to him, ‘John’s disciples often fast and pray, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours go on eating and drinking.’” In this verse, “they” refers to the Pharisees and their cohorts. This was their second complaint about Jesus’ disciples. It was that Jesus’ disciples were always eating and drinking. Probably this came from their envy. The Pharisees wished they could eat and drink freely and laugh out loud like Jesus’ disciples. But the Pharisees had long ago stopped doing so. When they ate, they carefully counted their calories and did their best to eat low-fat, diet food. They were concerned about high blood pressure, their cholesterol level and not being able to fit into their expensive priestly garments. Moreover, they forgot how to laugh. What really bothered them was that the disciples were so joyful. So they tried to make Jesus’ disciples seem barbaric and unqualified for religious service.

The Pharisees were skillful in their complaint to Jesus. They began by talking about John the Baptist’s disciples. It was well known that John the Baptist and Jesus were coworkers. John the Baptist was a holy prophet of God who lived a pure life in the desert to receive God’s message and deliver it to his people. His mission was to prepare the way for Jesus, the coming Messiah. Out of absolute devotion to this mission, John led an austere and ascetic lifestyle. His disciples learned fasting and prayer from John and practiced them. At first glance, it seems that the Pharisees were commending John’s disciples. But in fact, they had severely criticized John (7:33). Yet, at present, it suited them to acknowledge the holy lifestyle of John’s disciples.

The Pharisees also mentioned the fasting and prayer of their own disciples. It was true that they fasted and prayed. They were well disciplined in the rituals and religious practices of the Jewish law. They fasted twice a week (Lk 18:12). They also prayed regularly. But their practice of these activities was ostentatious and motivated by the desire to receive men’s praise. Nevertheless, the Pharisees associated the fasting and prayer of their disciples with those of John’s disciples.

In contrast, Jesus’ disciples did not fast, and it would be quite some time before they really learned how to pray. After deciding to follow Jesus, they went right on eating and drinking. They had never imagined to be religious leaders. They had been fishermen and tax collectors; they were labor class people. Their crude behavior while eating was the basis for three successive conflicts with the religious leaders (5:30; 5:33; 6:1). When they heard the Pharisees’ criticism, they got a cultural shock. They lost their appetites as well as their confidence to be Jesus’ disciples.

How did Jesus deal with the Pharisees’ criticism? Look at verse 34. “Jesus answered, ‘Can you make the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them?’” Jesus compared his disciples to guests of the bridegroom at a wedding banquet. And he himself was the bridegroom. What an amazing comparison and what a marvelous defense of his

young disciples! Everyone knows that the guests of the bridegroom at a wedding are called to be joyful and to celebrate with the bridegroom. But there is more to Jesus' words than a simple defense of his disciples' eating behavior. Jesus explains the underlying reason why they should be joyful and why it was time for happy celebration, not gloomy stoicism. In fact, Jesus explains the reason for his coming into this world.

Jesus calls himself the bridegroom. It is in relation to his people. Revelation 19:6-7 say, "Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: 'Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him the glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready.'" Again, Revelation 21:2-3 say, "I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.'" In short, Jesus is the bridegroom and his church is his bride (Eph 5:22-33). Jesus' affection for his people is intense and unfailing like that of a bridegroom for his bride. At last, his holy bride will be a vast multitude of believers and their union with Jesus is joyful and eternal; it can best be understood like a joyful wedding. But Jesus builds his church one person at a time, and the union begins on earth.

In the previous passage, Jesus called one person, Levi the tax collector, to be his disciple, saying, "Follow me." Levi heard Jesus' word and believed and left everything and followed Jesus. Levi committed himself to Jesus. And Jesus committed himself to Levi. It was the beginning of an eternal love relationship between them. Through the love of Jesus, Levi was changed little by little from a selfish tax collector to a man who knew the love of God deeply. Levi became St. Matthew, who wrote: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven," and "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:44-48).

Jesus is our bridegroom. He came to call sinners one by one to make us holy and beautiful and a part of his glorious church. He speaks to us tenderly through his word, and when we respond in faith and obedience, we become his precious bride for all eternity. Fanny Crosby was a sorrowful girl who was blinded from a young age by a quack charlatan's mistake. But one day she heard the voice of Jesus calling her. She accepted his word and began a life of faith. She discovered that Jesus was her true bridegroom. The flaming affection of Jesus for her was sweeter and more powerful and enduring than any human affection could be. The love of Jesus stirred her soul again and again to write the most beautiful hymns of love and praise to him. They say that she wrote 9,000 hymns all together and about 30 of them are in our hymn book. Among them is, "I am thine, O Lord." Life in Jesus is happy and joyful like a beautiful and perfect romance which lasts forever. Therefore, the disciples had to be joyful and celebrate together with Jesus. "Joy" is an acronym. "J" stands for Jesus; "O" stands for others; "Y" stands for yourself. When we love Jesus first, others second and ourselves third, we can have real joy in our souls.

Christian life is really joyful. But this joy is not human or worldly in nature. It is the spiritual joy that comes from God himself. Jesus described this joy in the parable of the lost sheep (Lk 15:1-7). A shepherd had 100 sheep and lost one of them. But he did not console himself with the thought that he still had 99 sheep. He missed his one lost sheep as though that were his only sheep. So he went to find it, leaving the 99 behind. He searched high and low, day and night, until he found the lost one. When he found it, he hugged it and put it on his shoulders and went home. Then he called his friends and neighbors together and had a celebration party. He said, "Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep." There is great rejoicing in heaven over one lost soul who is found. God shares this joy with his people. After the JBF Easter Bible Conference, Shepherd Tony King looked so joyful. Do you know why? It may have been partially because of his wife, Joy King. But mainly it was because of God's work in the heart of Wesley Jun Jr. through his labor of love. The other day, Missionary Joshua Hong sounded so joyful. Someone asked why. He said, "My new sheep at the U. of Chicago accepted Jesus with repentance and tears." This kind of joy comes from heaven and makes us really happy.

Look at verse 35. "But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; in those days they will fast." To become the bridegroom of sinners, Jesus paid a high price. He suffered on the cross the terrible pain of separation from God to take upon himself the sin of the world. He died on the cross as the Lamb of God to save us from our sins. When he died the curtain of the temple, which represented the separation between the holy God and sinful men, was torn in two. Through Jesus' death we can come to God. At the time of Jesus' crucifixion, the disciples would mourn for him. Then they would fast. Jesus was confident that someday his disciples would learn fasting and prayer for the glory of God.

Second, new wine into new wineskins (36-39).

Jesus knew that his ministry of love as a heavenly bridegroom and the joy of heaven could not be understood by the legalistic Pharisees. So he told them a parable: “No one tears a patch from a new garment and sews it on an old one. If he does, he will have torn the new garment, and the patch from the new will not match the old” (36). If a fashion-conscious young lady has a \$500 designer dress and a \$12 pair of old Levi jeans, she will not cut her expensive dress to patch her old jeans. This illustration might have hit the Pharisees hard because they wore expensive priestly garments. They would not cut their priestly garments to make patches for their old sweatshirts from college.

Still, the Pharisees did not understand. So Jesus told them another parable. Look at verse 37. “And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined.” New wine has to go through a fermentation process. This produces gas which causes its container to expand. But old wineskins are too rigid and inflexible to expand. So when the pressure gets too great, they burst. The wine runs out and the wineskin is ruined. Look at verse 38. “No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins.” New wineskins are flexible. They can expand with the dynamic new wine. So new wine must be poured into new wineskins.

Here Jesus explains that his word and the Spirit that accompanies it are like new wine. They are powerful and dynamic and explosive. Hebrews 4:12 says, “For the word of God is living and active....” To contain his precious words of life, a man must be like a new wineskin; he must be willing to learn and willing to change. He must be humble enough to obey Jesus’ word as it is. Jesus’ first disciples, mentioned in Luke chapter 5, were like new wineskins.

Simon Peter was a fisherman. One day after Simon had worked hard all night, Jesus suddenly borrowed his boat and used it as his podium for teaching the word to a great crowd of people along the shore. When Jesus had finished, he told Simon, “Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.” Simon was tired, for he had not slept all night. Simon was also discouraged for he had not caught even one fish. Simon had already cleaned up his nets and was ready to go home. His wife and little Peter were anxiously waiting for him. Yet he said to Jesus, “But because you say so, I will let down the nets” (5:5b). Simon obeyed Jesus’ word, overcoming his own ideas and human desires. When he did so he caught such a large number of fish that his nets began to break. Simon’s simple obedience made him like a new wineskin. Finally he became a good shepherd for the early Christians in the image of Jesus.

Levi the tax collector was known as a public sinner because he turned his back on his suffering people and hardened his heart to take advantage of their trouble for his personal gain. In the eyes of everyone around him, he was “washed up.” His wife and children could not respect him. They only held out their hands once a week for their allowance; as soon as he gave it to them, they disappeared until the next week. Even his dog ran the other way unless he was out of dog food. But Jesus saw Levi with hope. And he called him, saying, “Follow me.” At once, Levi got up, left everything and followed Jesus. Levi made a clear commitment to live a new life, giving Jesus’ word first priority. Levi was like a new wineskin.

On the other hand, the Pharisees were like old wineskins. They were useless to God. They did not receive his precious word; they did not grow to understand God’s heart. They were proud, stubborn, and legalistic. There is a problem for American young people. It is the tendency to postpone obedience and to calculate about Jesus’ words without commitment. Such people never learn and never grow and still act seven years old at the age of 60. May God help us not to be like old wineskins, but like new wineskins through simple obedience and commitment to Jesus.

Let’s read verse 38 again. “No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins.” Jesus wants to pour his new wine into us and fill our hearts with the love of God and true joy. But to contain this new wine we must be like new wineskins. From Jesus’ first disciples we learn how to be new wineskins. When we hear Jesus’ word, we must obey it simply and absolutely. And we must make a clear commitment to follow Jesus as of first importance. Those who do so can grow in Jesus endlessly and become great servants of God.

May God help you to accept the love of God and to accept Jesus as your eternal bridegroom. May God give you spiritual joy that brings true happiness to your soul. May God help each of us to be a new wineskin kind of person who can grow into a great servant of God.