

NEW WINESKINS

Luke 5:33-6:11

Key Verse: 5:38

"No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins."

Today Jesus teaches us why cultural Christians are useless to God. Jesus also teaches that we make God sorry if we practice law without God's mercy.

First, new wine into new wineskins (5:33-39).

The teachers of the law criticized Jesus' disciples: "John's disciples often fast and pray, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours go on eating and drinking" (33). Jesus' disciples were not used to ritualism. Especially, Jesus' disciples might be very reluctant in keeping fasting rituals. Originally, the practice of fasting began with a sincere longing for the holiness of God. Originally, the practice of fasting began for true repentance. But in Jesus' time, fasting was hypocritical. They say that modern hypocrites get up late, around 12:30 p.m., and then they are idling until sunset. After sunset, they eat a \$300 dinner all night. Likewise, the religious leaders of Jesus' time were just like contemporary hypocrites. Those hypocrites came to Jesus and said, "How come your disciples don't fast, but eat so much?"

How did Jesus answer? Look at verse 34. "Jesus answered, 'Can you make the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them?'" By implication, Jesus was telling them that the disciples' mood should be as joyful as a wedding feast. Jesus compared his disciples to the guests of the bridegroom at a wedding feast, and he himself to the bridegroom. This very verse implies that Jesus is the Messiah who restores the joy of the wedding, which was established by God in the Garden of Eden as the supreme happiness of mankind. To our sorrow, this happiness of the wedding was ruined by one man's disobedience to the holy command of God (Ge 2:15-17). As long as they were with Jesus, the Messiah, they could eat a lot and really rejoice to their hearts' content. It is amazing that Jesus compared sinners' banquets to the kingdom of God (Lk 15:7). Jesus is our eternal Bridegroom. We have true happiness in Jesus. The Pharisees were leaders of their people. But they did not shepherd God's flock of sheep under their care. Still, they were very unhappy because Jesus' people were very happy. So Jesus said to them, "Can you make the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them?" (34) In this verse, Jesus implies that as long as they are with the Messiah, it is not necessary for them to be sorrowful and fast out of depression. "But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; in those days they will fast" (35). This verse suggests that after Jesus' crucifixion and

burial, all the flock of God's sheep would fast out of unbearable sorrow. Jesus was very sorry that the Pharisees, who were the shepherds of his people, had no shepherd heart, nor God's mission. Jesus came to a conclusion that they were useless, like old wineskins.

Jesus told them this parable. Look at verse 36. "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." The meaning of this verse is very simple. For example, there was an old woman who had a fixed materialistic idea. She had piled up two barns of old newspapers. But she had no idea of throwing them away. In this parable, Jesus is teaching them that the Pharisees' idea was so fixed in legalism that they were useless, like moth-eaten cloth. If a man sews a moth-eaten piece of cloth on a new piece of cloth, both become useless. What is worse, they do not match. Simply speaking, the Pharisees looked good, but they were as useless as moth-eaten cloth. Still, the Pharisees did not understand Jesus' words. 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." The Pharisees' spiritual condition was as weak as that of worm-eaten wineskins which have no capacity to contain explosive new wine. Why were they like old wineskins? There were many reasons: They were proud, lazy, habitual, and selfish. But when we carefully study the Bible, the main problem was their self-righteousness.

This is the reason Jesus chose uneducated disciples. Despite their shortcomings, they were humble--humble enough to learn from Jesus. In addition, the disciples were young and elastic and dynamic, like new wineskins, in making success as well as in making many mistakes. Jesus did not hesitate to conclude: "New wine into new wineskins." Many leaders of mainline churches say, "The mainline church leaders are very corrupted." We must remember Jesus' words, "new wine into new wineskins." Jesus warns us in verse 39 not to be corrupted like old wineskin Christians.

Second, Jesus defends the cause of his hungry disciples (6:1-4).

One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and his disciples began to pick some heads of grain, rub them in their hands and eat the kernels (1). In the previous event, the disciples enjoyed eating the delicious food prepared by the former tax collector Levi. Soon, the disciples were hungry again, after less than two hours, as if they had skipped their lunch. At the moment, they saw ripened heads of grain in the field. So the disciples began to pluck them and rub them in their hands, put them

in their mouths and swallow them up. It is quite uncertain whether they chewed the kernels or not. Look at 6:2. "Some of the Pharisees asked, 'Why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?'" These Pharisees were alarmed by the fact that Jesus' healing and preaching ministry drew people's full attention. The situation had developed to the point of a head-on collision between Jesus and the Pharisees. The Pharisees were out to discover the mistakes of Jesus' disciples. They saw that the disciples were eating the kernels deliciously. They also saw that the disciples had devastated one huge corner of someone's grainfield. The Pharisees charged them with violating the Sabbath law by working on the Sabbath. Actually, the disciples did not work but picked some heads of grain and rubbed them in their hands. But the Pharisees defined their plucking, rubbing and eating as work on the Sabbath and they accused them of doing what was unlawful. The disciples were quite embarrassed, as if they had been caught shoplifting.

Immediately Jesus began to defend his disciples, even though by the rules of the Pharisees the disciples' guilt was obvious. How did Jesus defend his disciples? Look at verses 3,4. "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God, and taking the consecrated bread, he ate what is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions" (1Sa 21:1-6). At that time, David was running for his life from King Saul. So David went to Ahimelech the priest, who lived in Nob. Ahimelech sensed that David's situation was critical. At that time, David and his companions were hungry and needed someone's help. David asked Ahimelech, the priest, for some bread and a sword. Ahimelech knew that it was unlawful to give them the sacred bread. But Ahimelech could not send David away empty-handed. Ahimelech believed the law must be practiced with God's compassion.

Soon, Ahimelech's giving the bread was reported to King Saul, who was full of the devil. Then King Saul came with his men and slaughtered Ahimelech and his whole family (1Sa 22:18). Ahimelech simply protected David out of God's deep compassion. Like Ahimelech, Jesus also defended his disciples. But he did not abolish the Sabbath law. He demonstrated how to practice the law with God's mercy.

Third, the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath (5).

Look at verse 5. "Then Jesus said to them, 'The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.'" The phrase, "Son of Man," invariably refers to Jesus. That is to say, if David could override the law without blame to feed himself and his comrades, how much more can Jesus, the Messiah, do so! In verse 5, when Jesus said, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath," it is the declaration that Jesus is the Son of God who

came to the world to save men from their sins by taking up all the sins of all men. Jesus does not condemn us because of our iniquities and transgressions. Nobody else can forgive men's iniquity and transgression. Only Jesus can defend us and forgive all our sins. Martin Luther said, "If I were God, I would destroy mankind three times a day." But Jesus is our good shepherd (Jn 10:11; 1Jn 2:1b). In Jesus only, we can find refuge, salvation, eternal life and the kingdom of God. But we should not abuse God's love. In 1917, when the communist revolutionaries were marching into Moscow, the priests were fiercely arguing about what kind of finger motion they had to use when giving the benediction. They did not care at all about their poor and suffering people. Finally, they were punished by the communists. In the same way, the Pharisees' failure was their self-righteousness. They did not serve God; they only served themselves. They were evil. But they never repented their sins before God (Ro 2:7,8).

Fourth, "Get up and stand in front of everyone" (6-8).

Let's think about another event which happened on another Sabbath. As usual, Jesus went into the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was shriveled (6). Uniquely, Luke the physician mentioned that it was his right hand that was shriveled. This man had a serious life problem because his right hand was shriveled. He must have been a junior high school dropout. Until elementary school, he had no problem because of his shriveled hand. But when he became sensitive about himself before many pretty girls, he lost the desire to go to school. For survival, he had many job interviews, but he was not accepted. He must have formed the habit of keeping his shriveled hand hidden behind his back or in his pocket. Because of his shriveled hand, he could lose all the boxing matches. Because his right hand was shriveled, his heart must have been shriveled, also.

If hands are the symbol of men's power, his shriveled hand was the manifestation of his miseries of life. This unimportant man, who was in deep sorrow due to his life problem, was sitting quietly in a corner of the synagogue. Certainly, he also heard the good news that Jesus heals the sick and preaches the kingdom of God. He heard that Jesus welcomes anybody and everybody. When he heard that Jesus came to the synagogue in his town, a beam of hope smeared into his heart. But there was a really devilish group of people. As soon as the Pharisees saw the man with the shriveled hand, they picked him as bait in trapping Jesus instead of trying to help the helpless. And they watched Jesus closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath (7). Their hearts were evil. They were devils under the cloaks of priests.

What could Jesus do in this situation? "Jesus knew what they were thinking..." (8a). To Jesus, this was a critical moment. To Jesus, to help the helpless was right. But to heal a man whose right hand was shriveled was not easy because of the Pharisees' plot to kill him. Their intrigue was flaming and fiendish. Here we learn that evil men cannot destroy the truth. Even if the atmosphere was murderous, Jesus did not give up the man with a shriveled hand, but wanted to restore his shriveled hand. As soon as Jesus saw the man, he said, "Get up and stand in front of everyone" (8). This verse verifies that Jesus is the Messiah who came to this world to save men from their sins.

If Jesus restored the man with the shriveled hand, he would publicly violate the law of the Sabbath. Humanly speaking, restoring the man's shriveled hand meant intentionally ignoring the authority of the Pharisees and offending their pride. But Jesus did not mind. Jesus said, "Get up and stand in front of everyone." Praise Jesus for his courageous faith! Proud human beings are reluctant and unwilling. When they have to obey him, proud human beings usually refuse to obey Almighty God. As a sinful human being, Jesus' command to him was an impossible obedience test. He was a sensitive man because of his shriveled hand. It was scary for him to stand in front of everyone, while all of them were staring at him; it was especially hard to stand in front of the Pharisees.

How did this man respond to Jesus' words? He was a man who had a habit of hiding his hand behind his back. But when Jesus said to him, "Get up and stand in front of everyone," he overcame his habit of hiding his hand behind his back, got up and stood there in the middle of the room. This was an act of faith and obedience. In that hostile environment, Jesus compelled him. But after hearing Jesus' word, "Get up and stand in front of everyone," he felt the power of God circulating in his soul. After hearing the voice of Jesus, he had enough faith to stand up in front of everyone. Therefore, it is important for him to hear the word of Jesus.

Fifth, "to save life or to destroy it" (9-11).

Look at verse 9. "I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?" In this verse, Jesus was asking what the concept of good and evil was to them. But they were silent, partly because they did not know the concept of good and evil, and partly because they were angry. But mainly they were silent because Jesus pierced their consciences.

What did Jesus do next? Look at verse 10. "He looked around at them all, and then said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' He did so, and his hand was completely

restored." Now he could get a proper job and live for the glory of God. Jesus restored his hand at the cost of Jesus' own life. Jesus did not think about his future ministry or his own life. He cared for this poor man with a shriveled hand. In this way, Jesus revealed that he is the fulfillment of the law of God. Let's read verse 5:38. "No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins." May God help us not to be self-seeking or self-righteous.