

STUDY ON THE PARABLES OF JUDGMENT

The Parable of the Old and New

Read Luke 5:27-39

After the healing of the paralytic, Luke records the call of Levi (also known as Matthew) and the banquet that was held later in his home. This dinner with tax collectors and sinners prompts a strong reaction from the Pharisees to which Jesus responds, *"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."* Luke then records the question over fasting. The Pharisees are not impressed with the rather sloppy approach to fasting regulations employed by Jesus and his disciples, to which criticism Jesus makes the point that a wedding is not for fasting. A collection of parables illustrates this point: new garment on old; new wine in new wineskins; a person who has started drinking old wine will not put up with a new wine.

The call of someone like Levi was against the grain. Based on his profession as a tax collector, he is viewed as deceitful, a scum and outcast of the Jewish society. The Jewish people rightly considered them (tax collectors) extortioners because they could keep whatever they over-collected. A tax collector bid against others for the tax-collecting contract. The Romans awarded the contract to the highest bidder. The man collected taxes, paid the Romans what he promised, and kept the remainder. Therefore, there was great motivation for tax collectors to over-charge and cheat any way they could. It was pure profit for them.

Although almost everyone hated tax collectors, it is remarkable to see how Jesus loved and called Levi. It was a well-placed love; Levi responded to Jesus' invitation by leaving his tax collecting business and followed Jesus. This must have meant a considerable sacrifice, for tax collectors were normally wealthy.

Q: How can our love bring in people like Levi into the kingdom of God today?

Levi (Matthew) gave up much to follow Jesus, but he was not sad. He was happy enough to give a party. One reason Matthew gave the party was because he wanted his friends to meet Jesus. A saved man does not want to go to heaven alone. What an evangelistic party!

Rather than rejoice at this evangelistic party giving the opportunity for other tax collectors and sinners to meet Jesus, the Pharisees complained. Their complaint was that Jesus and his disciples had friendly relationships with notorious sinners, eating at the same table, attending the same feast with them. The accusation came indirectly against Jesus, through His disciples.

Jesus' answer was simple yet profound:

"Jesus answered and said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."" (vv31-32)

Jesus' critics were sick with sin also, but they refused to see themselves that way. They thought other people were sick with sin, not themselves.

Reasons Why People Might Refuse A Doctor:

- Perhaps you do not know that you are sick.
- Perhaps you know you are sick, but you think you will get better on your own – you do not know that you need to go the doctor.
- Perhaps you know you are sick, and know you need a doctor, but do not know there is a doctor to help you.

- Perhaps you know you are sick, and know you need a doctor, and know there is a doctor, but do not know the doctor can help you.
- Perhaps you know you are sick, and know you need a doctor, and know there is a doctor, and know the doctor can help you, but do not know the doctor wants to help you.
- Perhaps you know you are sick, and know you need a doctor, and know there is a doctor, and know the doctor can help you, and know the doctor wants to help you, but you know what the doctor will tell you to do, and you just do not want to do it.

It is important to note that Jesus is the perfect doctor to heal us of our sin.

- He is always available.
- He always makes a perfect diagnosis.
- He provides a complete cure.
- He even pays your fee for the doctor!

The Pharisees were not done with their discontent. Mark's rendition of this same discourse revealed that John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting.

“The disciples of John and of the Pharisees were fasting. Then they came and said to Him, “Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?”” (Mark 2:18)

Perhaps, the eating and drinking accusation (the initial accusation) was because they were fasting while they saw Jesus and His disciples eating and drinking. This next question reveals their heart.

“Then they said to Him, “Why do the disciples of John fast often and make prayers, and likewise those of the Pharisees, but Yours eat and drink?”” (v33)

Jesus answered their question with an allusion to the wedding practices of His day. A wedding feast was the most vivid picture of joy and happiness in that culture. During the weeklong wedding feast, it was understood that joy was more important than conformity to religious rituals. Jesus said that His followers should have this kind of happiness. There would come a day when fasting is appropriate for Jesus' followers. But at that present time, when Jesus was among them, it was not that day.

“But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them; then they will fast in those days.” (v35)

It is quite common in Jesus' parables that He will refer to an “interim period” between when the king, master, bridegroom etc. will not be around, and then at a time by and by, he will return. This is speaking of His own return at the Millennium reign and beyond. In this interim period, the friends of the bridegroom, the virgins, servants etc. depending on the parable are meant to fast, do business till He comes, have oil in their lamps and so on... We are in this “INTERIM PERIOD”. It is important we pay attention to what Jesus is revealing in His parables.

Old & New Garments

Jesus' point is clear. You cannot fit His new life into the old forms. This explains why Jesus did not begin a reform movement within Judaism, working with the rabbinical schools and such. Jesus says, “I have not come to patch up your old practices. I come with a whole new set of clothes.”

Jesus reminds us that what is old and stagnant often cannot be renewed or reformed. God will often look for new vessels to contain His new work, or vessels that have emptied themselves of the old so they can carry His new work. This reminds us that the religious establishment of any age is not necessarily pleasing to Jesus. Sometimes it is in direct opposition to His work, or at least resisting His work.

“And he gave them this illustration: “No one rips up a new garment to make patches for an old, worn-out one. If you tear up the new to make a patch for the old, it will not match the old garment.” (v36 TPT)

Patching up an old garment with a piece of a new garment not only disfigures the new garment, but also causes the old garment to become more ragged than ever, for the new piece has still to shrink and will then pull the old threadbare garment to pieces. Just as fatal will it be to adapt the principles of Jesus to the old systems.

Wine & Wineskins

Here is the same contrast of old and new that we saw in the parable of the patched garment. His point is the same: you cannot join the new to the old or you will ruin both the new wine and the old skin. When God is about to birth His new which in this case illustrated by new wine, you cannot put that into old structures represented by old wineskin. It just would not work.

Having put Jesus' teaching in perspective, however, we must pause to grapple personally with the power of his words: *“And who pours new wine into an old wineskin? If someone did, the old wineskin would burst, and the new wine would be lost. New wine must always be poured into new wineskins.” (vv37-38 TPT).*

What are the structures of our own age and culture that cannot coexist with the new wine of the Spirit? What have we tried to sew Christianity onto that will cause a greater tear and undermine the faith itself? In Jesus' day, it was the legalistic spirit of the Pharisees. What is it in your own life? What is it in your work, your community, your school, your environment?

“New wine must be poured into new wineskins,” not accommodated to those comfortable things in our lives with which it is basically incompatible. The message for disciples is to be uncompromising about our faith and the work of the Spirit in our lives. If our honoured customs and habits, and the structures of our society must adjust to that, then so be it.

Old & New Wine

“And no one, having drunk old wine, immediately desires new; for he says, ‘The old is better.’” (v39)

Jesus is addressing the familiar, the general acceptable norm. Everyone in the natural that have drunk of “old wine” would really prefer it to “new wine” because the old is matured, cured, and aged, ready for the beautiful taste. That is where many sits. However, God is inviting us to His “new wine”. It is not familiar, not always comfortable, and challenges your comfortable norms.

Will you like others say: “the old is better”? or will you confidently embrace “God’s new”?

