



Luke 5:36–39

36 He told them this parable: ‘No one tears a piece out of a new garment to patch an old one. Otherwise, they will have torn the new garment, and the patch from the new will not match the old. 37 And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. 38 No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins. 39 And no one after

drinking old wine wants the new, for they say, “The old is better.”

Reflection

I love picturing Jesus feasting with tax collectors and ‘sinners’. I imagine him eating and drinking with common people, with colourful characters from all walks of life, with pasts that they aren’t proud of and presents that they are perhaps trying to escape. I love that the son of God came down to dine and socialise with those who lived on the margins of polite society, real people with real problems coming to terms with their own sinfulness and looking for a fresh start in the teaching and person of Jesus.

And I think it is clear from reading the New

Testament that Jesus had a kind of magnetism that drew people from all walks of life to him. Most surprisingly perhaps, Jesus, the greatest religious teacher and practitioner the world has ever seen, was popular amongst many of the widely acknowledged sinners of his generation. This intrigues me greatly because holiness and sin usually repel each other. People who are sinful become antagonistic or very uncomfortable in the presence of those they perceive as moral and upright. Criminals don't usually socialise with clergy; those who drink and smoke and gamble tend to avoid the clean living types. And largely the reason for this is ideas of perceived judgment, or perhaps at a deeper level the feeling that the holiness of the other person shines a mirror on their own sin. No-one likes to be reminded of their own

shortcomings in the presence of Mr. Perfect.

And yet Jesus was the holiest person to ever walk the earth. He was by definition Mr. Perfect. But paradoxically, many of the great sinners of his generation were drawn to him and appeared to very much enjoy his company. No doubt his perfection made them acutely aware of their own failings but something in Jesus' character was so overwhelmingly attractive that they could enjoy Jesus' company despite what his presence caused them to begin to confront in their own lives.

And I expect that this 'something' was how much Jesus loved them. In his presence they could feel his love. Far from judging them, his unconditional love and example

awakened in them a desire to become better versions of themselves. What began to stir in them was a desire to work towards becoming the people that God had always intended them to be, people like Jesus. To stop pushing down their sin and guilt and to finally confront it, confess it, and leave it behind for ever. And I expect this release, this fresh start, this new resolve was the source of much of the joy and excitement in Jesus' presence.

In yesterday's passage Jesus spoke of this energy in terms of a wedding celebration. Jesus' disciples had suspended the Jewish practice of fasting to revel in the joy of Jesus' presence for a time. And at the level of Old Testament allusion, God who is often spoken of as the bride and lover of his people Israel, has come down

for a time to be married to his people, his church. Here's the language Jesus used yesterday,

34 Jesus answered, 'Can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? 35 But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; in those days they will fast.'

Jesus further explains his bridal metaphor in today's passage with a couple of parables. I'll read it now from Luke 5:36–39. Fittingly one of them is about wine, which flowed freely at Jewish weddings, and is also an evocative symbol for Israel in the Old Testament.

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one tears a piece out of a new garment to patch an old one. Otherwise, they will have torn the new garment, and the patch from the new will not match the old. 37 And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. 38 No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins. 39 And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for they say, "The old is better."

Now it's easy to get a little lost in these two parables because of the historical distance. The genius of Jesus' parables is how he explains and makes memorable often profound theological concepts through the use of the mundane. Jesus

draws his illustrations and examples from everyday life in the ancient world to ensure that his hearers can relate to what he is saying with the added bonus of the next time they go out to sow their fields, or tend their sheep, or mend a garment or reach for a wineskin they'll recall his teaching to mind. The problem for us is that few of us are in the regular habit of sewing patches on cloaks or are familiar with ancient viticulture. So to fill in the gaps, a new patch sewn onto an old garment simply doesn't work – it is incompatible, because, when washed, the new patch will shrink tearing both patch and garment. Everyone knew that back then. Similarly, new wine expands. New leather wineskins will expand with it, but old ones, already expanded and now brittle, will burst if they are paired with new wine

– likewise, the two are incompatible. And everyone knew that too.

What's Jesus' point? Sober fasting and wedding feasts? Old garments and new patches? Old wines skins and new wine? Jesus point is that he cannot be integrated into or contained by pre-existing structures, even Judaism, Torah and synagogue. The old is passing away and the new is here, and it is better by far. The old way of relating to God through law and sacrifice and synagogue is passing away. And the new way of relating to God through his Son and Spirit is here. The old is gone, the new is here and it is better by far.

Think & Pray

We might say the same of our old way of life before encountering Jesus. The old is gone, the new is here and it is better by far. But also, that the two are incompatible. Just as an unshrunk piece of cloth sewn onto an old garment will destroy both cloth and garment so too will trying to have it both ways when it comes to your old and new way of life. Living with one foot in the kingdom of this world and one foot in the kingdom of God is a sure way to ruin both new wine and old wine skin – a sure way to ruin your life. Your old life lived for self and your new life lived for Jesus are incompatible. Judaism, as good as it once was, had become an old, worn-out garment. It could not be patched with a few things taken from Christ's gospel. Just as your old life or mine could not be redeemed by working in a few Christian

truths or principles here and there. And why would we want to? New wine cannot be restrained by old, unyielding structures. There is a wedding to be celebrated, the union of Christ and his church; a victory to be savoured, the defeat of Satan, sin and death; and a revival to be caught up in; the renewal of our whole earth.

Are you being held back in your enjoyment of God by vestiges from your past? Are you trying to blend your old life and your new only to find painful incompatibility? What sin still entangles you? What wrong desires still lure the thoughts of your heart? Confess them to God today. Ask for his help to change the thoughts and motives of your heart so that you can fully experience the joy of the presence of Jesus Christ in your life. The wedding

we are celebrating is between Christ and his church. The love we are celebrating at this wedding is the unconditional and limitless love that Jesus has for his church which includes you and I. The old is gone; the new is here, and Jesus is better by far. Worship him with the whole of your life today.