

NEW WINE INTO NEW WINESKINS

Mark 2:18-28

Key Verse: 2:22c

“No, they pour new wine into new wineskins.”

In the previous passage Jesus demonstrated his authority on earth to forgive sins by healing a paralyzed man. Jesus called a tax collector, Levi, as his disciple. And Jesus ate together with tax collectors and sinners. All of these acts were revolutionary. Jesus came to set people free from the bondage of sins, human traditions, and societal prejudices, and to give new life. Wherever Jesus went, new life began to sprout and grow. Old ways of thinking and lifestyles were being challenged by Jesus' gospel ministry, which had great transforming power. It was like a mighty wave of new life to defeat the power of sin and death embedded in the traditions and practices of the times. Naturally, a collision took place between two irreconcilable forces: the gospel and Judaism--the establishment power of the times. The gospel overpowered Judaism with its lifegiving spirit. Yet Judaism was a stubborn foe, opposing the gospel.

Today, we also face the collision of two forces: gospel truth and our own establishment power. This establishment power is expressed through our sociopolitical and education systems, and has conflict points on moral issues, our view of the world and history, and other matters. Though this power is strong, the gospel truth is stronger. We desperately need this gospel truth in our nation. In fact, this gospel truth is Jesus himself. Let us consider who Jesus is and what it means to live out gospel truth in our times. We can divide today's passage into three parts: Jesus is our bridegroom (18-20); Jesus is the new wine (21-22); and Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath (23-28).

First, Jesus is our bridegroom (18-20). The conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders began when Jesus declared that he had authority on earth to forgive sins. This challenged the religious leaders to accept Jesus' divine authority. But they did not. So they thought Jesus' claim was blasphemy. The conflict was exacerbated when Jesus called Levi, the tax collector, to follow

him as his disciple and then ate with tax collectors and sinners. At the apex of this conflict was how to deal with sinners. The religious leaders forbade anyone from associating with public sinners to keep the community holy. On the other hand, Jesus would rather engage with public sinners with love and saving grace to heal them, like a spiritual doctor. Jesus would embrace rather than cast out; include not exclude.

Now another conflict arose, over the practice of fasting. John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees were fasting, while Jesus' disciples were feasting. Since Levi, as his expression of thanksgiving, had invited Jesus to his home for a delicious feast, tax collectors and sinners found great hope in Jesus. They also invited Jesus and his disciples so that there was a feast every day. When the disciples hung around Jesus and served many needy people, they often had no chance to eat. They were always hungry, fasting unintentionally. But when they were invited to someone's house, they ate and drank freely. They felt that becoming a disciple of Jesus was most blessed. When people saw how Jesus' disciples enjoyed eating and drinking, they wondered how they could be spiritual leaders. Some people came and asked Jesus, "How is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?" (18)

In Jewish society, fasting was the expression of self-denial in order to pray and seek God. In the Law, one day per year, the Day of Atonement, was set aside for fasting (Lev 16:29,34). It was a national day of humiliation before God to seek atonement for their sins and to renew their spirit to live for the glory of God. After the Babylonian exile, four other fast days were added, in order to commemorate events having to do with the destruction of the temple¹. In Jesus' time, pious people fasted twice a week (Lk 18:12). Fasting was an expression of holy desire to draw near to God. However, as time passed, it was regarded as a sign of piety before people. Those who fasted well were respected as pious people; those who did not fast were despised as worldly. Jesus did not deny the value of fasting, although he did expose the hypocrisy of doing so for the wrong motive (Mt 6:16). In this event, Jesus'

¹Bar-Hayim, David (15 July 2010). "The Four Fasts and their Halakhic Status Today". Machon Shilo. Retrieved 28 September 2017.

concern was not to deal with the issue of fasting, but to defend his disciples by explaining that it was not time for them to fast.

In what way did Jesus defend his disciples? He said, “How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them” (19). Jesus compared himself to a bridegroom and his disciples to his guests at the wedding. Jewish weddings, like any weddings, were very joyful events, and the celebrations often lasted a week. It was unthinkable to fast during such festivities. Now, Jesus was with his disciples and their fellowship was joyful, like at a wedding feast. Christian life is characterized by joy. As long as we follow Jesus, we can be joyful always, regardless of our circumstances. Some people think that Christian life is ascetic, like life in a monastery. They try to refrain from doing anything except religious activity. Humor and laughter are discouraged; only holy words can be spoken. But Jesus compared Christian life to a joyful wedding celebration. Frequent eating fellowship with laughter and joyful conversation is normal for Christians. So we enjoy it. When I first came to UBF, I remember people would frequently start laughing with joy while eating, working, or even in the middle of a message or testimony--though the content sounded serious to me. I thought they were strange people. But I really liked being around them. I realized that this kind of joy is the best apologetic for the gospel. It is good to experience this joy in our community. Jesus wants us to be joyful always; this is God’s will for us (1Th 5:16). The joy of the Lord is our strength, and a joyful heart is good medicine (Ne 8:10; Pr 17:22).

However, the time would come when Jesus would be taken from his disciples. Historically, this happened through his death on the cross (20). Then they fasted. This traces us that when we feel distant from Jesus, we should fast. Figuratively speaking, this fasting means to repent. To Jesus’ disciples, having a relationship with him is most important, more than anything else. Sometimes, when we commit sin, even unintentionally, we lose joy and feel miserable, no matter what we do. When King David committed the sin of adultery and murder, he lost the joy of salvation. He confessed, “...my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.’ And you forgave the guilt of my sin” (Ps 32:4b-5). Then his joy was restored. Sometimes, we need to repent with fasting to restore our

relationship with God. Fasting may include from social media, entertainment or Internet browsing. Through this fasting we can restore our relationship with Jesus and be joyful. Let's accept Jesus as our bridegroom and be joyful always.

Second, Jesus is the new wine (21-22). After defending his disciples, Jesus went on to explain how his ministry was different from Judaism. In verses 21-22 he used two analogies: "No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. Otherwise, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins." In these analogies, unshrunk cloth and new wine represent Jesus and the gospel. The old garment and old wineskins represent Judaism. Jesus' point was that Judaism could not contain the gospel because the gospel is dynamic and vibrant and has life-giving power. In what respects is the gospel so powerful?

First of all, the gospel has power to transform people from the inside out. Unlike empty human philosophies, the gospel is the God's power for the salvation of everyone who believes (Ro 1:16). Tori Kelly is a talented young singer who signed a record deal at the age of 12 with the assurance she would be successful and famous. When that deal fell through, she was told she did not have the right personality and was not pretty enough and doors closed one after another culminating in being sent home from American Idol. Her sense of rejection was overwhelming. She withdrew to her room and began to write a journal to process her emotions and to articulate prayers to God. She met Jesus, who created her, loves her, and is pleased with her, and surrendered her life to him. She found that she could be happy and be herself when she was surrounded by Jesus' love. She began to record her own music and found her unique voice. Success followed to such a degree that won the Grammy award in 2019, for her gospel song "Never Alone." Now she testifies that all other things are empty; Jesus is everything. The gospel transforms people from the inside out. "If anyone is in Christ the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" (2Co 5:17)

In addition, the gospel breaks down old systems and customs, and establishes a new gospel-centered community, where there is real freedom

based on the lifegiving truth. There are evil systems in our society, which can hide in plain sight. Eight days ago, 33 missing children were rescued from human trafficking in Southern California.² Some of them had already begun to be sexually exploited. This is just the tip of the iceberg. It is related to the pornography and abortion industries, which destroy millions of lives each year. These evil systems should be ended! We need to remember that they are symptomatic of the degeneration of societal values, from Biblical to humanistic. To end evil systems, we must restore Biblical values based on gospel truth. How can we do this? By holding onto and proclaiming the gospel truth. The gospel has power, through changed people to break evil systems, liberate people and create a new society. Dr. Haywood Robinson performed hundreds of abortions. In 1986, he heard the gospel truth for the first time and came to faith in Christ. He was totally changed in his inner attitudes. He said, “[God] opened our eyes to how heinous this war against babies is and He launched us on a pro-life career.” He shares his testimony nationwide to expose the facts of the abortion industry with 40 Days for Life, a pro-life organization that has saved thousands of babies and empowered 190 workers in the abortion industry to leave the field.³ When this one man was changed, a new community was formed to advocate for life and our nation changed. This is why we must proclaim and live out the gospel truth.

Wherever the gospel is preached, a spiritual revolution takes place—quietly, but very powerfully. Jesus is the new wine who gives us forgiveness and new life with the Holy Spirit. In order to contain this new wine, we should be like new wineskins. It means that we should be flexible, ready to follow, learn and grow in response to the new wine working within us. Pride, laziness, and stubbornness are traits of an old wineskin which make one unfit for receiving the new wine. We must put off our old self and put on the new self in order to become new wineskins (Eph 4:22-24). We assume that new Christians are like new wineskins, and they usually are. We also assume that older Christians are like old wineskins, and sometimes we are. Yet it is not a matter of years, but of attitude toward Jesus. When we really follow Jesus day by day and learn humbly from him, we can always be like new wineskins.

² <https://nypost.com/2021/01/23/33-missing-children-rescued-during-trafficking-probe-in-ca/>

³ <https://www1.cbn.com/former-abortionists-turned-pro-life-advocates>

Third, Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath (23-28). As Jesus had defended his disciples from the fasting police, he now defends them from Sabbath legalists. One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. The disciples were always hungry. Subconsciously their hands reached out and began to pick some heads of grain, rub them together to remove the husks, and eat them. Suddenly, the Pharisees, who were hiding in the fields, popped up and said, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?" (23-24). Why was this such a big deal to the Pharisees? They thought Jesus' disciples broke the Sabbath law. In the Old Testament, keeping the Sabbath law was so important it was included in the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:8-11). It was a sign of the covenant between God and the Israelites which was to last for generations. Anyone who desecrated the Sabbath was to be put to death (Ex 31:13-14). In order to keep this Sabbath law, they gave detailed instructions, including 1,261 specific rules. For example, 39 activities were forbidden, including reaping, threshing, cooking, gardening, lighting a fire. And each of these categories was developed in detail. Writing one letter of the alphabet on the Sabbath was okay, but not two. Erasing one letter was okay, but not two. Their intention was to help people keep the Sabbath holy. However, their diligent regulatory effort led to strict legalism, which bound people.

Jewish people were tightly bound by these Sabbath rules. To them, picking heads of grain was harvesting; separating and removing the husks was threshing and winnowing. They had lost the spirit of the law, which is love, and became legalistic, critical, and judgmental. They did not know God's heart of mercy and compassion. When I studied in college, my business law professor taught us, "The law should be used as a shield, not a sword--to protect people, not attack them."

How did Jesus defend his disciples? He answered, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need?" (25) By saying, "Have you never read," Jesus exposed the Pharisees' spiritual dullness. Though they had diligently studied the Bible, they did not understand what God really wanted to communicate. They missed the point of God's love and compassion. Jesus explained how God's law of love works. He said, "In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he [David] entered the house of God and ate

the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions” (26). In a time of crisis, David and great need, David went to God for help. He ate consecrated bread, which was lawful only for priests to eat. The high priest understood David and allowed this. It was because he knew God’s heart of mercy for the needy. God received David in a time of need and helped him. It was because David loved God with all his heart. So he was known as a man after God’s own heart (Ac 13:22). God sees the heart (1 Sa 16:7b). To Jesus, his disciples were doing well. They were as precious as David. They loved God and followed Jesus sacrificially and joyfully. Jesus defended them so that they might grow as shepherds like David.

Then Jesus taught the true meaning of the Sabbath in verse 27: “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” Jesus reminded them of God’s original intention in establishing the Sabbath. After finishing the creation of heaven and earth, God rested on the seventh day. God rested, not because he was tired, but for our benefit. God blessed the seventh day and made it holy for our restoration spiritually, physically, mentally, and emotionally (Gen 2:2-3). God did not make the Sabbath to control us, but for our wellbeing. It is because God loves us, who are made in his own image. God wants us to stop ordinary work and come to God to worship him, have fellowship with him, serve one another in love with Christ’s mindset, and find real rest. By reminding us of God’s original purpose, Jesus taught us to value people’s lives more than keeping the law.

Then Jesus declared, “So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath” (28). This declaration is profound and amazing. It means that Jesus is God, who created the heavens and the earth. Jesus has sovereign authority over all things. Jesus is the center of everything. Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath. So, to keep the Sabbath well, we must accept Jesus as Lord in our hearts. Christian life is not a matter of engaging in many activities. It is to follow Jesus, love him, worship him, and listen to his word. Then, whatever we do, we do out of love for Jesus, and we learn of him and grow to be like him. This gives us true joy and peace. Augustine said, “Love God and do as you please.” Let us accept Jesus as the Lord of our lives and love him and serve him with all our hearts.