

Jesus' Greatest Hits

The Unshrunk Cloth & The New Wine

Part 27 - February 17, 2008

[VIDEO: GLOW CLEANERS]

What would you do if you went to the cleaners, and they'd shrunk (and ruined) half your clothes ... and when you complain they just point out that, hey, 50% of the work was good? Well, you'd find a new dry-cleaner! Because 50% just isn't good enough.

In the parables of The Unshrunk Cloth and The New Wine, this is exactly Jesus' point: it's gotta be all or nothing.

"No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. Neither do men pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved." - *Matthew 9:16-17 NIV*

Matthew, Mark, and Luke each record these parables and where Jesus was when He told them: it was just after Matthew (a.k.a. Levi) left his tax-collecting business to follow Jesus.

Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. - *Luke 5:29 NIV*

It was a huge event. Besides the tax collectors, sinners, Jesus, and Jesus' disciples ... the Pharisees, *their* disciples, and the disciples of John the Baptist were there.

Now, even though Jewish Law only required an annual fast (on the "Day of Atonement"), the Pharisees fasted every Tuesday and Thursday to mourn and plead with God to establish His Kingdom. And John's disciples had adopted this practice of "expressing broken-heartedness", as they waited for the Messiah to arrive.

Here's where it really gets interesting: I think that Jesus *told* Matthew to throw his party on a Tuesday or a Thursday!

Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. - *Mark 2:18 NIV*

This wouldn't have been an oversight ... and I don't think Matthew would've *intentionally* offended his guests when he only wanted to rejoice and celebrate ... and Jesus had a point to make.

So, we have this huge feast. Jesus and His disciples are chowing down with the “sinners”, while the Pharisees and John’s disciples just sit there, stewing and starving and muttering.

This isn’t the first time Jesus offended John’s disciples. At one point they had been quite jealous of His rising popularity.

They came to John and said to him, “Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan – the one you testified about – well, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him.” - *John 3:26 NIV*

And John himself had said to them:

I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him. The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom’s voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must become greater; I must become less. - *John 3:28-30 NIV*

So now, their leader (John) is in prison, and they’re at this party, and they just can’t take it anymore ...

Then John’s disciples came and asked him, “How is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?” - *Matthew 9:14 NIV*

And *this* is the question Jesus wanted burning in their brains! Why *didn’t* His disciples fast?! This is the key to grasping the depth of this passage!

Jesus answered, “How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them?” - *Matthew 9:15a NIV*

After a Jewish wedding, the couple held a week-long open house of feasting and celebration. And their attendants were *exempted* from all fasting through a rabbinical ruling which said:

All in attendance on the bridegroom are relieved of all religious observances which would lessen their joy. ¹

In the O.T. (through the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Hosea) the Lord pictures *Himself* as the husband of His people, Israel.² By NOT fasting, Jesus and His disciples are declaring that the Bridegroom of Israel has come ... and God is your midst!

Think of the irony. John’s disciples are fasting for the Savior to come, and they complain to Jesus for not fasting!

¹ *The Gospel of Mark*, by William Barclay, pg. 68

² Isaiah 62:5; Jeremiah 2:2; Hosea 2:19

Jesus isn't condemning fasting; He's announcing His arrival! "I'm bridegroom is here! Look around; the lost are found, sinners are saved, the blind can see, the lame can walk!"

And then He quickly foretells His death on the cross:

The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast. - *Matthew 9:15b NIV*

But then comes the resurrection; the reappearance of the bridegroom; and the celebration can continue forever! Righteousness is no longer about ritual washings, sacrifices, and dietary restrictions. These were shadows of things to come. He has come to exchange the old covenant for the new!

Now we are made righteous through Christ. It is by grace, through faith. And that means that His attendants are forever relieved of religious observances that lessen their joy!

But we must be aware of two truths. If we violate either of these, and we'll destroy our joy. The first truth is this: Jesus is like new cloth.

No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. - *Matthew 9:16 NIV*



New cloth shrinks when washed. So, you either have to find an *old* piece of cloth, or get a *new* set of clothes.

- Jesus won't be used as a temporary patch.

... for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. - *Galatians 3:27 NIV*

If you try to "weave" Jesus into the fabric of a sinful or self-centered lifestyle, things will simply fall apart.

On the red carpet at the Oscars, the interviewers always ask the stars who they're wearing. "Versace?" "Armani?" "Cavalli?"

Well, I'm asking *you*: Who are you wearing? Who do you put on when you get up in the morning? Who do you model to your friends and family and coworkers? Who do you wrap yourself in when times are tough?

We have to *clothe* ourselves with Christ and follow Him as Lord.

The second truth is this: Jesus is like new wine.

Neither do men pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved. - *Matthew 9:17 NIV*



Here's an ancient statue of a wineskin. They were usually made from the tanned hides of goats, with the legs and neck tied off. Their natural elasticity allowed fermenting wine to expand. But when they got old, they got brittle.

A growing relationship with Christ requires pliability; because His Spirit wants to stretch our wineskins. He's not after fermentation, but *sanctification*; the process of challenging and changing us more and more into His likeness.



[We] are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. - *2 Corinthians 3:18*

It's easy to become hardened in our ways, dried out from sin, and inflexible as we age. We need to remain softened to His Spirit.

Both parables speak of the destructive results of attempting to compromise a life *in* Christ with a life *outside* of Christ. Jesus was telling John's disciples that they cannot serve their old system *and* the Savior. And (in Luke) He points out a danger:

... no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for he says, "The old is better."
- *Luke 5:39 NIV*

Jesus knows that change is difficult; even when we're exchanging our tired old ways (that we know don't work), for the truth. Matthew gave up everything, and just got up and followed Him.

[Jesus] saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him. - *Matthew 9:9 NIV*

This is what He was celebrating!

Let's see how well you've been listening; answer *true* or *false* when I ask the questions. In this passage, we've learned that:

1. You can't patch Jesus onto selfish ways of behaving.
2. You can't pour His spirit into selfish ways of thinking.
3. Jesus is against fasting.
4. His Spirit will never stop stretching us.