

Red Chairables

The Unshrunk Cloth & The New Wine

Part 10 - July 31, 2011

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*



Capernaum by the Sea of Galilee

When Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness, he offered him all of this world's kingdoms; but Jesus chose instead to move his ministry to this humble, Roman, fishing village. That big, white building, in the middle, is a synagogue.

Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake ... - *Matthew 4:13 NIV*



The synagogue was rebuilt around 300^{AD} after the Romans destroyed the original (in 70^{AD}) with the Jerusalem Temple. But the houses surrounding it date to when Jesus moved in!



Capernaum sat along the 'Via Maris' trade route. So, it had a customs office (that charged fees on imports and exports), and a Roman garrison commanded by a resident centurion. And somewhere in this neighborhood lived the soon to be called, fishers-of-men, Peter, his brother Andrew (a disciple of John the Baptist), and their fishing partners, brothers James and John.



The black basalt portion of the synagogue is from the original where Jesus taught! He walked on that volcanic rock road. And This is the step he used!

Remember the centurion who sent this message to Jesus: "Say the word and my servant will be healed"; and Jesus said, "I've not found such great faith even in Israel"? (Luke 7:1-10) Guess where he lived!

... Jesus entered Capernaum. There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, "This man deserves to have you do this, because he loves our nation and **has built our synagogue.**" - Luke 7:1b-5 NIV

This is *that* synagogue! And, that customs office also collected use tolls (for the Via Maris, the market, the harbor, and the walled town) and taxes (on animals, carts, wheels, and axels). Guess who works in the customs office: Matthew/Levi! The wealthy, Jewish, tax collector who was reviled by his people for assisting the corrupt, occupying force in the Promised Land!

And *this* is the synagogue he wasn't allowed to step into!

Jesus is a 'rock star' in Capernaum! So he takes a ferry across the lake (to avoid the mob), and he heals a blabbermouth leper.



The Sea of Galilee from Capernaum

Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: "See that you don't tell this to anyone." ... Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere. - Mark 1:43-45 NIV

So Jesus returns to Capernaum; but things get crazier than ever!



... the people heard that he had come home. So many gathered that there was no room left, not even outside the door ... - Mark 2:1b-2a NIV

Pharisees and teachers of the law, who had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem, were sitting there. - Luke 5:17b NIV

This is when a paralytic is lowered through the roof of one of *these* houses! Jesus pardons his sin (which riles the religious), and then heals him to prove he has the authority to forgive sin! And the place goes nuts! People are shouting praises!



And *then* ...

After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. "Follow me," Jesus said to him, and Levi [aka Matthew] got up, left everything and followed him. - *Luke 5:27-28 NIV*

How can we even begin to imagine?!

This joyful, miracle-working, Jewish, Rock Star with an exclusive entourage, and a mob of admirers, stops and points at *you*, the most despised and rejected Jew in town, and says, "I choose *you*!" Do you get why Matthew left *everything* and followed?! *That's* a picture of repentance! Abandoning a defiled past and accepting a gracious invitation to join the party of truth, hope, and love!

Matthew's first impulse is to throw a party like Capernaum has never seen! *Everyone* is invited! No reprobate or social-outcast or ne'er-do-well was excluded ... or unnoticed.

Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." - *Luke 5:29-32 NIV*

They whine "to his disciples", but "Jesus answered them". How loud do you think they had to 'whisper' over the noise of *that* party?

He says, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor". Who are the healthy? Well, compared to the Great Physician, no one! There are only two camps: the sick who admit it, and the sick who won't! That's why he follows it up with "I have not come to call the righteous". We must admit our sin and acknowledge our need. Stunning! We're not *allowed* to make ourselves *acceptable* to God.

John the Baptist was in prison at this time (Mat. 4:12), but his followers (who knew Andrew very well) were at the party.

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

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*

Jesus isn't against fasting; he fasted 40 days in the wilderness. But, the Mosaic Law only requires one *annual* fast, on the Day of Atonement, (Lev 16:29) and the Pharisees had added two *weekly* fasts as a display devotion and earn God's favor. (Luke 18:12)

And John's disciples had adopted the practice and failed to discern the hypocrisy; even though Jesus had pointed it out:

When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. – *Matthew 6:16a NIV*

It was traditional to rub a little ash on your forehead (that's where 'Ash Wednesday' originates); but the Pharisees apparently went ape with the ash! They "disfigured their faces" with it!

But, why would Matthew plan a village banquet on a Pharisaical fasting day. It can't be an oversight if the most religious men in Capernaum regularly walk around looking like the undead! He's *already* despised! That's what he's trying to *un-do*! He just wants to honor Jesus and celebrate his decision to repent. So, why?!

I think Jesus *made* him do it ... because he had a plan.

John's disciples already had a big problem with Jesus' *loosey-goosey* take on the rigid religious ritual of ceremonial washing.

An argument developed between some of John's disciples and a certain Jew over the matter of ceremonial washing. 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 [You know, the One you claim is the Son of God?] – well, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him." [And he's producing un-strict followers who argue about ceremonial washing] To this John replied ... "I am not the Christ. ... 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. – John 3:25-29a NIV

The term "bridegroom" is OT imagery from Isaiah (62:5) and Hosea (2:16, 19) regarding the coming Messiah and Israel's redemption.

Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them?" – *Mark 2:19a NIV*

God gave one annual fast and seven annual feasts! If a God-given feast-day fell on a personal fast-day, the fast was supposed to be abandoned. Laws of sadness gave way to laws of joy. And a Jewish wedding banquet (which could last up to two weeks) was regarded as a feast-day and fasting was unthinkable.

So when they ask, "How is it that we and the Pharisees fast?" Jesus says, "How is it that you don't recognize the Bridegroom?!" "The lost are found, sinners are saved, lepers are cleansed, and the lame can walk! "The Lord who heals" (Ex 15:26) is in your midst! There's rejoicing in the streets! The Messiah has come!"



And *then* he told them this parable ...

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*

“You can’t make yourself spiritually healthy or holy or righteous with inflexible rituals like ceremonial washings. You’ll only succeed in shrinking whatever joy you find in my grace.” “Don’t follow in the Pharisees’ footsteps. They rejected John’s baptism of repentance because of their pride. They’ve only made themselves unyielding, unforgiving, and incompatible with grace.”

“You have repented, but you’re reluctant to shift your allegiance from the Law to the Lord and from religion to relationship.”

Likewise, if we try to patch a little Jesus onto an old, self-centered lifestyle, our faith will fall apart. We must ‘clothe’ ourselves in Christ (Gal 3:27), by repenting and following!



And then he added:

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*

They’re called wine ‘skins’ because they were chiefly made from tanned goatskins. New wineskins are soft and pliable and stretch with the gases of fermentation. Rigid, old, leather bags split as the gas expands.

“I’m bringing an effervescent power of grace that’s as compatible with rules-based-religion as these tax collectors are with those un-pliable, Pharisaical, old gas-bags!” “They can’t even take the pressure of mingling with the very ‘sinners’ the Messiah was sent to preserve!” “They should be filled with joy over God’s eagerness to forgive and restore; but their swollen pride has caused them to burst out in anger and dampen this feast with their whining.”

And then, after the parable, he makes a sad observation.

And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for he says, “The old is better.” – *Luke 5:39 NIV*

Change is a challenge, even when replacing worn-out old ways with a vibrant truth that we know we can trust. But still, it’s got to be all or nothing!

He didn’t come to put a new patch on an old rag; but to offer a ‘robe of righteousness’ through the ‘new wine’ of his blood.