

Luke 5:33-39
November 4, 2018

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

If you were with us the last couple of weeks, we watched Jesus work His ministry. He performed a miracle in a home where he healed a paralytic brought down through a roof. And last week we watched Jesus call Levi and then have dinner with him and many other tax collectors, i.e. “sinners.” In both situations, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law were in the audience. They were there very intentionally because they felt it was their job to make sure Jesus wasn’t leading the Jewish people astray. They listened with a critical ear and challenged Jesus in each situation. The first controversy was claiming He could forgive sins. The second was that Jesus was willing to hang out with “sinners.”

Transition: Today’s passage is another record of why Jesus is facing growing opposition with the Pharisees. We will see yet another controversy that develops. Let’s see what bothers them and how Jesus responds. Let’s begin.

BOOK (NIV 1984):

V.33:

- They said to him, “John’s disciples often fast and pray, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours go on eating and drinking.”

V.34:

- Jesus answered, “Can you make the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them?”

V.35:

- But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; in those days they will fast.”

V.36:

- He told them this parable: “No one tears a patch from a new garment and sews it on an old one. If he does, he will have torn the new garment, and the patch from the new will not match the old.

V.37:

- And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined.

V.38:

- No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins.

V.39:

- And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for he says, ‘The old is better.’”

Process Observations/Questions:

Q V.33: What seems to be the Pharisees focus? [Following the prescribed religious rules]

Q: What are they questioning? [They want to know why John’s disciples along with the Pharisees often fast and pray, but Jesus’s disciples keep eating and drinking.]

Q V.34-35: How does Jesus respond? [**“Can you make the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them?” But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; in those days they will fast.”**]

Q: First, let’s make sure we understand his illustration. If he talks about a bridegroom and his guests, what is the occasion? [A wedding]

Q: Are weddings happy occasions or sad occasions? [Happy – Jewish weddings lasted a week and were times of great joy and celebration! If you know the Bridegroom, then you can share His joy.]

Q: He then says, “A time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them.” What event is he describing here? [A bridegroom’s death, which is a sad occasion. In the Jewish tradition people fasted while they were grieving.]

Observation: If we follow this illustration, here’s what Jesus is saying to His critics: The bridegroom’s presence and the occasion of a wedding makes eating and drinking very appropriate. But to ask the guests of a bridegroom to express sadness and sorrow through fasting is highly inappropriate in this context.

Q: What’s the spiritual truth Jesus is communicating? [“I came to make life a wedding feast, not a funeral. If you know the Bridegroom, then you can share in His joy.” Even though Jesus’s message is one of repentance, repentance leads to a joyous celebration of forgiveness and membership in the kingdom, not sorrow and mourning!]

Q V.36: Jesus offers a second illustration to the Pharisees in the form of a parable. What do you see? [No one takes a patch from a new garment and apply it to an old garment. He uses common sense to explain why no one does that.]

Q: Since Jesus is contrasting the “old with the new,” what represents “old,” and what represents the “new?” [The “old” is Judaism, the ways of the Pharisees. The “new” is the Gospel message.]

Q: What’s the spiritual truth that Jesus is conveying in this parable? [The Gospel of grace does NOT mix with Judaism!]

Q V.37-39: Jesus shares another old vs new illustration. What do you see? [Pouring new wine into old wineskins]

Q: What’s the problem with that? [New wine will burst the wineskins, which leads to loss of the wine and wineskins that will be ruined.]

Q: Again, what is the spiritual truth Jesus is emphasizing? [The Gospel of grace does NOT mix with Judaism! They are incompatible.]

LOOK:

Share John MacArthur's thoughts on this passage: "The Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Gospel of God, as Paul calls it, the Gospel of grace, the message of forgiveness through the work of Jesus Christ, the Gospel which we know and love and believe is UNIQUE. When I say the Gospel is unique, I mean to say that it is incompatible with any and all other religious beliefs. *It stands alone. The idea that the Christian gospel can mix with or blend with any other religious system in any way is absolutely wrong.* It mixes with no other religion. It accommodates no other religion. In fact, it replaces all other religion. This needs to be emphatically understood in a time which exalts diversity of belief, tolerance of religion, pluralism, inclusivism, and even universalism, which essentially says we're all headed the same direction. And that singularity of the Christian gospel means that any intrusion that mixes or alters the singularity of the gospel renders it void, nullifies it. It stands alone....Luke 5:33-39 is very important and very focused on...the uniqueness of the Gospel. And what this passage does for us is demonstrate that the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Gospel of salvation is incompatible with Judaism...we're going to find that Jesus didn't come to add to Judaism. He didn't come to alter Judaism. He didn't come to blend with Judaism. He came to bring the Gospel, which replaced it along with all other religions."

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 1, pp. 188–189). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

***The Bridegroom* (vv. 33–35).** The scribes and Pharisees were not only upset at the disciples' friends, but also at their obvious joy as they fellowshiped with Jesus and the guests. We get the impression that the Pharisees experienced little if any joy in the practice of their religion (see Matt. 6:16; Luke 15:25–32). Jesus was “a Man of Sorrows” (Isa. 53:3), but He was also filled with joy (Luke 10:21; John 15:11; 17:13).

Jewish weddings lasted a week and were times of great joy and celebration. By using this image, Jesus was saying to His critics, “I came to make life a wedding feast, not a funeral. If you know the Bridegroom, then you can share His joy.” He said that one day He would be “taken away,” which suggested rejection and death; but meanwhile, there was good reason for joy, for sinners were coming to repentance.

Fasting is found often in the Old Testament, but nowhere is it commanded in the New Testament. However, the example of the prophets and the early church is certainly significant for believers today. Our Lord's words in Matthew 6:16–18 assume that we will fast (“when,” not “if”), and passages like Acts 13:1–3 and 14:23 indicate that fasting was a practice of the early church (see also 1 Cor. 7:5; 2 Cor. 6:5; 11:27).

***The garment* (v. 36).** Jesus did not come to patch up the old; He came to give the new. The Pharisees would admit that Judaism was not all it could be, and perhaps they hoped that Jesus would work with them in reviving the old religion. But Jesus showed the foolishness of this approach by contrasting two garments, an old one and a new one. If you take a patch from a new garment and sew it to an old garment, you ruin both of them. The new garment has a hole in it, and the old garment has a patch that does not match and that will tear away when the garment is washed.

In Scripture, garments are sometimes used to picture character and conduct (Col. 3:8–17). Isaiah wrote about a “robe of righteousness” (Isa. 61:10; see also 2 Cor. 5:21), and he warned against our trusting our own good works for salvation (Isa. 64:6). Many people have a “patchwork” religion of their own making, instead of trusting Christ for the robe of salvation that He gives by grace.

***The wineskins* (vv. 37–39).** If unfermented wine is put into brittle old wineskins, the gas will burst the skins and both the skins and the wine will be lost. The new life of the Spirit could not be forced into the old wineskins of Judaism. Jesus was revealing that the ancient Jewish religion was getting old and would soon be replaced (see Heb. 8:13). Most of the Jews preferred the old and refused the new. It was not until A.D. 70, when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the temple, and scattered the people, that the Jewish religion *as described in the Law* came to an end. Today, the Jews do not have a priesthood, a temple, or an altar; so they cannot practice their religion as their ancestors did (see Hosea 3:4).

The things in the ceremonial Law were fulfilled by Jesus Christ, so there is no need today for sacrifices, priests, temples, and ceremonies. All of God's people are priests who bring spiritual sacrifices to the Lord (1 Peter 2:5, 9). The tables of Law have been replaced by the tables of the human heart, where God's Spirit is writing the Word and making us like Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 3:1–3, 18).

Jesus Christ still offers “all things new” (Rev. 21:5). As the Physician, He offers sinners new life and spiritual health. As the Bridegroom, He brings new love and joy. He gives us the robe of

righteousness and the wine of the Spirit (Eph. 5:18; also see Acts 2:13). Life is a feast, not a famine or a funeral; and Jesus Christ is the only one who can make that kind of a difference in our lives.

Martin, J. A. (1985). Isaiah. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 218)

The sentence addressed to Jesus in 5:33 causes some difficulty. If the Pharisees and religious leaders were still talking, it seems strange that they would refer to their own disciples as **disciples of the Pharisees**. It is possible that this teaching of Jesus is from a different setting, but that Luke included it here because it continued the purpose of this section. The accusation was that Jesus and His disciples refused to fast, in contrast with the disciples of John and of the Pharisees, who were seen as righteous people. Jesus' response was that the new way (His way) and the old way (the way of John and the Pharisees) simply do not mix. He gave three examples.

1. A bridegroom's **guests** (cf. John 3:29) do not **fast while he is with them** because it is a joyous occasion. They **fast** later after he is gone.

2. A **new** unshrunk **patch** of cloth is not put on an **old** garment because it will shrink and the tear will be worse.

3. **New wine** is not put **into old wineskins** for as it ferments it will break **the old skins**, which have lost their elasticity, and both the **wine** and the skins **will be ruined**.

In each case two things do not mix: a time of feasting and a time of fasting (vv. 34–35), a new patch and an old garment (v. 36), and new wine and old wineskins (vv. 37–38). Jesus was noting that His way and the way of the Pharisees simply are unmixable. The Pharisees would refuse to try the new way for they assumed that their old way was better. Jesus' teaching was considered by the Pharisees and religious leaders to be like **new wine**, and they wanted no part in it (v. 39).

Stein, R. H. (1992). Luke (Vol. 24, pp. 184–187). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Context

The third controversy story in the present series involves a contrast between Jesus' disciples who were not fasting and the practice of fasting of both the disciples of John the Baptist and of the Pharisees. The culmination of the present story is found in the two similitudes and the proverb at the end, which are dominated by the catchwords "new" and "old." The scarcity of discussion of fasting in the NT makes it difficult to believe that this account was created by the early church or that it was preserved in order to justify the Christian practice of fasting. Because of the joy of living in the victory of their Lord's resurrection, fasting appears to have been an exception in the early church and was limited to special occasions (cf. Acts 13:2–3; 14:23; 27:1–38). Even when the church fasted, sorrow was not present, and the examples of fasting in Acts have nothing to do with mourning (cf. Matt 6:17–18). Furthermore, the early church did not seek to explain its practice of fasting on the basis of this passage.

This account demonstrates the contrast that exists between the new and the old, i.e., between the coming of God's kingdom inaugurated by Jesus (Luke 16:16) and the old Judaism of the Pharisees. Luke made a number of changes to the Markan account. Several are merely literary or stylistic, but by his changes in 5:36–39 Luke sought to heighten the eschatological realization of the new age inaugurated by Jesus.

Comments

5:33 John's disciples often fast and pray. That John had disciples is evident here and in 7:18–19; 11:1. The reference to John's disciples praying was added by Luke, who also pointed out in 11:1 that they had a specific prayer or way of praying that identified them as a group. The combination of “fast and pray” is also found in 2:37; Acts 13:3; 14:23.

Eating and drinking. Luke changed Mark's “not fasting” to “eating and drinking,” which was a favorite expression. In so doing he tied this account more closely with the preceding one in which Jesus' disciples were accused of eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners (5:30). In 7:34 these two criticisms are brought together when Jesus is described as a friend of tax collectors and sinners and as a glutton and drunkard.

5:34 Jesus' reply assumes that the expression of sadness and sorrow through fasting is inappropriate in the present context. The bridegroom's presence and the joy of the kingdom inaugurated by Jesus makes such behavior highly inappropriate. There is a time for everything. But this was not a time for weeping or mourning; it was rather a time for laughing and dancing (Eccl 3:4). Since the question is introduced with the Greek particle *mē*, it anticipates a negative answer from the reader. Even though Jesus' message is one of repentance (Luke 5:32), such repentance leads not to sorrow and mourning but rather to the joyous celebration of forgiveness and membership in the kingdom. Compare 15:17–24.

Guests of the bridegroom. There is no OT or rabbinic example in which the term, bridegroom, is used as a messianic title. As a result, Jesus appears to have been using this term as a simple metaphor and not making a specific messianic claim by applying a well-known messianic title to himself.

5:35 The time will come. “The time” is literally *days*. (By translating the text in this manner, we better observe the tie with the same expression used again later in this verse.)

The bridegroom will be taken. This is a reference to the violent end of the banquet time brought about by the crucifixion. Although in the setting of Jesus this saying would have possessed a riddlelike quality, for Luke and his readers the once-veiled reference to the crucifixion would have been transparent.

In those days. The contrast is not between the time of Jesus' ministry and the time of the church after the resurrection, as in 22:35–36, but between the period of Jesus' ministry and the time between his arrest and resurrection (24:17–20; cf. also John 16:20; 20:11–13). The period after the resurrection was not characterized by sorrowful fasting but rather by joy (Luke 24:41, 52; Acts 8:8; 13:52).

5:36 He told them this parable. Luke added the term “parable” to the account. The term *parabolē* has a large semantic range and can include proverbs (4:23), metaphorical or figurative sayings (Mark 7:14–17), similitudes (Luke 13:18–19), story parables (14:16–24), example parables (12:16–21), and allegory (20:9–19). Here it describes a metaphorical or figurative saying.

The analogy that follows is heightened by Luke's modification of Mark 2:21: “unshrunk cloth” (Mark) to “new garment” (Luke); “the new piece will pull away from the old” (Mark) to “he will have torn the new garment” (Luke); and “making the tear worse” (Mark) to “the patch from the new will not match the old” (Luke). Since a patch is not destroyed in the same way as wine, Luke used the illustration of a new garment from which a patch is taken in order to create better parallelism between the two figurative sayings. Luke's emphasis in the analogy lies with the new garment and new wine, for the term “new” appears seven times in Luke 5:36–38 compared to only four times in the Markan parallel. Thus in Luke the emphasis falls on the “newness” of the kingdom

brought by Jesus, whereas in Mark it falls on the tearing of the old garment. For Luke, to patch the old with the new not only did not help the old but, more importantly, tore apart the new.

5:37 The incompatibility of the new and the old is demonstrated by another analogy. New wine if placed in old wineskins will destroy both skins and wine because as the new wine ferments, the old wineskin is not sufficiently pliable and thus will burst, spilling out the wine. One cannot place the new wine of the gospel in the old wineskins of Pharisaic Judaism, for what will result is neither the gospel nor Judaism. Later history has shown that attempts to syncretize Christianity with another religious movement lead to an offspring inferior to both.

Wineskins. These were dehaired skins of small animals, such as goats, which were sewn together to hold water (Gen 21:15), milk (Judges 4:19), and wine (Josh 9:4, 13).

5:38 This saying emphasizes the need for compatibility in both the metaphorical picture (new wine cannot be placed in old wineskins) and the reality (the “new” gospel cannot be placed within the “old” Pharisaic Judaism).

5:39 No one after drinking old wine wants the new. An attempt has been made to interpret this verse, so that Jesus is portrayed as the one who preserves rather than abolishes the old, but the concern of the two similitudes is with the “new,” not the “old.” In order to maintain consistency with the meaning of the previous statements, this verse should be interpreted as an ironical condemnation of those who cling so closely and dearly to the past that they are not open to the present realization of God’s kingdom. In particular we should see here the preference of the Pharisees in Jesus’ time (and the circumcision party in Acts 11:2–3; 15:1–2, 5 in Luke’s time) for the “old” over the “new.”

The Lukan Message

The main Lukan emphasis in this passage is eschatological. Jesus brought with him the “new” (cf. Jer 31:31–33). God’s kingdom has been realized. The Anointed One has brought with him the fulfillment of the OT promises (Luke 4:18), and the joy of the awaited age has come. As a result, there is no room for fasting or mourning. There would come a brief period (Good Friday to Easter Sunday) where such fasting would be appropriate. This, however, would pass quickly and then, even more than before, fasting would be inappropriate as the church lives in the joy of the resurrection and the exaltation of our Lord. What fasting there will be has nothing to do with sorrow or mourning (cf. Acts 13:3; 14:23). This “newness” is later described as the inauguration of a “new covenant” (Luke 22:20). The new covenant is not contrary to the “old covenant” but is instead its realization and fulfillment. See Introduction 7 (2). Yet it cannot simply be absorbed into the “old,” and some of the implications of this truth can be seen in Acts 11:2–3; 15:1–5.

The exact relationship of John the Baptist to the new covenant is not clear. In this passage it seems that he was understood as part of the old since his disciples fasted whereas Jesus’ disciples did not (cf. Luke 7:28). Yet it seems best to see John as a transitional figure who in one sense belonged both to the “old” and the “new.” See comments on 16:16. A foreshadowing of the passion is again seen in the forceful “taking away” (5:35) of the bridegroom.