

On the Way to the Cross – New Wine for New Wine Skins

Our God is always doing a new thing! In **Isaiah 43:18-19** the Lord says, *“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland.”* Can any of you hear God saying, *“I’m doing a new thing.”* Can you perceive it (recognise the change)? The Lord starts off by giving some sound advice. He literally says, *“Leave your past behind you.”* For some, it may feel like you’re in a desert right now - a wasteland. But get ready! God is building a highway. He’s making a river. Yes, God has already started to do a **new thing** in your life. So be prepared!

As you know, we are doing a series titled **“On The Way To The Cross.”** The purpose of this series is to examine some of the pertinent and profound things that Jesus said during His time on earth. We are charting a chronological course (walking with Jesus) from the time He started His ministry, to the Cross. Note, we will be paying close attention to what the Lord says and not to what He does. We are now approximately one year into the Lord’s journey. He has already called five men - Peter, Andrew, James, John, and Matthew - to be His disciples. However, this has upset the self-righteous leaders, the religious establishment. Those who hate change!

Let’s pick up the story from **Luke 5:33-35**... *Then they said to Him, “Why do the disciples of John fast often and make prayers, and likewise those of the Pharisees, but Yours eat and drink?” And He said to them, “Can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them; then they will fast in those days.”* (Referring to His crucifixion)

Although there was but one day of fasting per year prescribed in the Law, many Pharisees fasted twice a week, making a big show of their piety in the process. Jesus, who was well acquainted with the discipline of fasting because He Himself had fasted for 40 days and nights, condemned all forms of hypocrisy in fasting, prayer and giving. He saw this as a form of practicing self-righteousness before men, to be noticed by them. However, in this passage, which leads to the **Parable of New Wine**, we find the religious leaders criticising Jesus and His disciples for neglecting to fast and even pray. They were accusing Jesus and His disciples of violating their own ‘man-made’ rules and regulations. Something that was totally unacceptable to their way of life. But Jesus’ reply goes far deeper than the immediate accusation. The Lord addresses the general issue of religious formalities and sanctimonious practices that are not open to change.

Here then is Jesus’ answer to their objections in the form of the Parable of New Wine in Old Wineskins: *Then He spoke a parable to them: “No one puts a piece from a new garment on an old one; otherwise the new makes a tear, and also the piece that was taken out of the new does not match the old. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine will burst the wineskins and be spilled, and the wineskins will be ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins, and both are preserved. And no one, having drunk old wine, immediately desires new; for he says, ‘The old is better.’”* (**verses 36-39**). Notice that the parable is in two sections to help us understand how the old practices, though useful enough in their own time and place, cannot contain the new vitality of the New Covenant (the Gospel of Grace).

The first illustration is the new garment and the patch. **“No one tears a piece of cloth from a new garment and puts it on an old garment.”** It would be ridiculous to try to mend an old garment by destroying a new one.

If any piece of cloth is to be cut out from a garment it would be the other way around. People always seek an older,

discarded garment as a source of material for patching newer ones. Likewise, we cannot take a piece of the New Covenant and patch it on to the Old Covenant and hope for it to work. Both will be ruined. A devotional routine or doctrine from the Gospel of Grace could not be inserted back into Judaism and it be legitimate or admissible. Hence, the gentile believers could not find ready acceptance in the synagogues of the Jews. No, they would need to organise new ways to “gather together” of their own (from house to house as in Acts).

The truth being, the essence of the Good News of the kingdom cannot be patched into Judaism. Something much more radical than a patch or alteration is taking place here. A new building block has now become the “cornerstone” of a whole new religious order. The very stone which the builders rejected has become the Chief Cornerstone (**1 Peter 2:7-8**). The building methods of the past are no longer applicable. God is doing a **new thing!** And in doing a new thing, God does not patch up the old with the new. If He did it would not be a new thing - would it? What is also interesting here is that the Greek word “kainos” is used for “new.” This word denotes that which is ‘unused’ (brand new, never existed before), and of a new nature. Therefore, the “new garment” is not a continuation of the past order or past experiences. It is completely different in essence and character. What’s more, it isn’t something that is new in respect of time.

The second illustration in this parable is that of “new wine” poured into old wineskins. It carries exactly the same idea but with an emphasis not found in the illustration of “the patch from a new garment placed on an old garment.” *“And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine will burst the wineskins and be spilled, and the wineskins will be ruined.”*

The new wine, which is still in the process of fermentation, will produce an effervescence and gasses that will expand and eventually burst an old wineskin. Just so with the New Covenant and the message of salvation by grace through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. New forms, practices and doctrines will be needed to accommodate the vigour and rapid expansion of the Living Word being preached.

The brittle nature of the old forms of Judaism can clearly be seen in **Acts 13** and **Acts 2**. When Peter preached his first sermon after the day of Pentecost, the conclusion of the leaders of the old system was that these “ignorant and unlearned men” must be prevented from speaking any longer in the name of Jesus. The old wineskin could not stand the strain and effervescence of the New Wine. Similarly, in **Acts 13**, during the first missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas, Paul’s clear Gospel message earned them the “honour” of being expelled from Perga. The old system was too jealous of the dynamic fermentation going on among the new believers. After all, lives were being changed, people were being healed, set free and delivered. Even the dead were being raised!

No wonder the keepers of the old religious order had come to the conclusion that a convenient compromise could not be found. Some of them even left their positions as Synagogue rulers and joined the new order, fully following the Lord and having nothing further to do with their old positions in Judaism. Jairus (**Mark 5:22**) and Crispus (**Acts 18:8**) are notable examples. The message of Luke 5 is clear enough: The Pharisees are asking (in effect,) *“Why aren’t you guys fitting in with the old way of doing things? Look, even John’s disciples fast and pray. Why don’t Your disciples fast?”* Jesus’ answer is clear and it is liberating. He tells us that we will fast after He is gone, but this is banquet time. Fasting will come later.

But as to the larger question His message is this: *“Don’t try to patch the old system with doctrines from the New and don’t put the New Covenant into a brittle vessel.”* What is happening now will require a new way of thinking, a new way of relating to the past, and new forms and principles for the future. God is doing a **new thing!**

So how does this relate to us today? Well, the two Greek words used for “new” in the second segment of the parable will give us insight into this. *“And no one puts new (“neos”) wine into old wineskins; or else the new (“neos”) wine will burst the wineskins and be spilled, and the wineskins will be ruined. But new (“neos”) wine must be put into new (“kainos”) wineskins, and both are preserved.”* The “new wine”, that recent and energetic experience, cannot be poured into an old brittle vessel. The recent energetic experience of God’s kingdom (which has evolved out of the past), can only be poured into a vessel that is completely different in essence, nature and character from that which is contrasted as “old.” The word “kainos” implies, “something that has never existed before” - like the new birth!

Whenever God decides to do a **new thing (Isaiah 43:18-19)**, He will do it through vessels that are completely new in nature and character. That is, through vessels that have never existed before! He doesn’t take what is already in use and polish it up or restore it. God creates something totally fresh that is pliable and adaptable enough to house the dynamic and effervescent “new” (“neos”) move of His Holy Spirit. Do you see it? The Holy Spirit has been moving and exercising power since time began, so this “new” move is a continuation of the past glory. However, the vessels that are meant to contain the “new” move of the Holy Spirit are completely different to anything that has ever existed before. They are “new” in make up and in essence!

You and me are such vessels! There has never been such a time as this. When Jesus spoke this parable, He was probably looking down the corridors of time to this “fresh” move of His Spirit. If you feel like you’ve been in a desert, a wasteland, then you need to *“forget the former things and do not dwell on the past.”* For God is doing a new thing, and He is looking for vessels of honour that can take in the dynamic and effervescent power of His Spirit. The best way to get out of dry and parched land is to step into the “rivers of living water.” God is saying to you today, *“I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland.”* But it’s up to you to perceive (recognise) it.

Accept change! Embrace change! The **new thing** which God is going is all about change. So don’t be like the religious leaders that Jesus was addressing. See yourself as a vessel of honour that has been specifically designed and created for such a time as this. There is freshness and vitality where the Spirit of God dwells. Esther was told, *“Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14)*

I truly believe that we have come into the Kingdom “for a time such as this.” We are the **new wineskins** - designed and created by God for Him to generously pour His Spirit into! There is an outpouring taking place!

The new wine is looking for new wineskins.