

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever known someone who was a chronic whiner? They are constantly whining about their health or the weather, or what's going on in Washington. Do you know someone like that? Now, do you think anybody was thinking about YOU?

Chronic whiners and complainers are everywhere. I came across a list of actual complaints that were sent to a travel company.

- (1) "On my holiday to Mumbai, India, I was disgusted to find that almost every restaurant served curry. I don't like spicy food."
- (2) "The beach was too sandy. We had to clean everything when we returned to our room."
- (3) "No one told us there would be fish in the ocean. The children were scared."
- (4) "We went on holiday to Spain and had a problem with the taxi drivers as they all spoke Spanish."
- (5) "I was bitten by a mosquito. The brochure did not mention mosquitoes."
- (6) "We bought 'Ray-ban' sunglasses for \$3 from a vendor outside the hotel and discovered they were fake."

You've heard of a Diner's Club Card. Did you know that you can now get a Whiner's Club Card? It says, "Tired of putting on a happy face? Well, so are we! Luckily, you've joined the Whiner's Club. You now have the exclusive right to gripe, groan and moan about your job, money healthy, friends, and sex life. Possibilities are endless! So wipe that silly grin off your face and get ready to drive the world crazy with your constant sniveling. You owe it to yourself to let the REAL YOU be heard." Do you know someone who needs that card? Do YOU need one?

In our passage we're going to discover there was a group of religious whiners who followed Jesus around complaining about what he did and said.

Mark 2:18-22. "Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. 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?' Jesus answered, 'How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them. But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast. No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, he pours new wine into new wineskins.'"

The Pharisees were professional whiners. They followed Jesus around like the moral police and criticized every He did and said. In the previous passage, they whined that Jesus had hung out with sinners and outcasts at a party Matthew had thrown. Jesus and His disciples were the party-goers and the Pharisees were the party-poopers.

In this passage, they hammer Jesus with another complaint. They whined, "John the Baptist's disciples fast, and of course, we fast, but your boys aren't very religious; we don't ever see you fasting!" Jesus took their complaint and responded with three mini-parables. The word parable means "para-bole." It means to through alongside. When Jesus told a parable, He told a natural story; then beside it, He tossed down a deep spiritual truth. Some of His Parables are long and famous like the parable of the Prodigal Son, or the parable of the Good Samaritan. But these three parables are only a few words. But they have some explosive truth for us. The first parable is about a wedding party. The second one is about a patch, and the third one is about wineskins.

1. A WEDDING FEAST ISN'T THE TIME TO FAST

John the Baptist's disciples fasted regularly and so did the Pharisees. They were upset that Jesus' disciples were partying while they were suffering. The Pharisees fasted two days a week, but they fasted simply as an outward display of their goodness. They weren't fasting for God's sake; they were fasting to be seen by others.

Fasting is a wonderful spiritual discipline. Jesus fasted and prayed often—but it wasn't a ritual designed for others to see. The Pharisees whitened their faces and piled ashes on their hair and moaned and groaned so everyone would know they were "spiritual." In Matthew 6, Jesus said, "When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting." Instead Jesus said, "When you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." (Matthew 6:16-18)

The Old Testament commanded Jews to fast only one day a year—Yom Kippur—the Day of Atonement. But the Pharisees had taken a wonderful act of spiritual discipline and had changed it into a badge of super-self-righteousness. In answering their criticism, Jesus compared Himself to a bridegroom.

I've been to some great weddings and wedding receptions in my 40 years of ministry. But from my study of Jewish weddings, the most elaborate American weddings seem dull compared to a Jewish wedding. The wedding feast is the climax of a year of betrothal. That time of expectation and planning was much more involved than our engagement period. Following the actual ceremony, there was a full week of eating, dancing, singing and celebrating that took place. In America, after the wedding, couples leave immediately for their honeymoon. But in Jewish weddings, the couple stayed and were treated like a king and queen—they were even given garland crowns to wear during the week-long celebration. It was the best week of their lives and the friends of the bridegroom did some serious partying—it wasn't a time for fasting! It was time to feast!

Jesus identified Himself as the Bridegroom. His Bride is the church. At this point the Bride hadn't yet been revealed, but she was waiting patiently for her time to make an appearance. Jesus said that while the party is going on, that's not the time to fast, it's time to feast. But the Bridegroom was going to leave, and then the disciples will fast.

Personal Application: Life is about a joyous relationship with Jesus; not religious rituals!

There is an important point we need to learn: The Christian life is more like a wedding celebration than a funeral procession. The real issue the Pharisees were addressing was, "It's not fair for you guys to enjoy life when we have to endure religion! If you were really holy, you would be miserable like us!"

The Pharisees were griping while Jesus' disciples were grinning. The Pharisees were somber, while Jesus' disciples were singing. The Pharisees were languishing while Jesus' disciples were laughing. The Pharisees were criticizing while Jesus' boys were celebrating. The Pharisees were jealous; Jesus' group was jubilant. Which group are you?

Jesus promises, "to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair." (Isaiah 61:3)

Before you came to church today, you had to make a choice about what clothes you would wear. In the same way, you have a spiritual decision to make daily. You can wear a garment of praise or you can carry around a blanket of despair. Joy and praise are gifts from God.

My mentor, Ray Stedman, wrote this about this passage: "Jesus is commenting here upon the joy that should characterize our lives when we discover the reality of a relationship with Jesus Christ. Church services, for far too many centuries, have been borrowed from an Old Testament concept of worship, and have presented a scene of solemnity and silence and ritual. Today, many people have the idea that a church service ought to be a time of silence, when everyone sits in supposed awestricken solemnity before God. But this is not the picture Jesus came to give. 'No,' he says, 'instead of the fast, it is a feast; instead of the sackcloth, there is a robe; and instead of solemnity, there ought to be joy.' One reason why so much of the church today is written off by people who have come to see what Christians are like is that they are turned off by the morbidity and dullness of what we call worship."

There are times to fast, but even when you fast, you shouldn't lose your joy. Joy is your birthright as a child of God. Esau sold his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of chili; it was red stew with beans—we call that chili. The devil comes to kill, steal, and destroy. He wants to kill your joy, steal your birthright, and destroy your testimony. Don't make a deal with the devil. Satan can't rob you of your salvation, but he will try to steal the joy of your salvation. Guard it carefully. Don't let him steal your joy.

2. A NEW PATCH WILL RUIN AN OLD GARMENT

Today we have developed all kinds of synthetic fabrics that don't shrink when washed. In Jesus' time, new cloth would always shrink after the first few times it was washed. A person wearing a new garment had to make sure it was a couple of sizes too large so over time, the garment would shrink down to the right size. Garments were often torn or moth-eaten so they were constantly repaired. If you had an old robe with a hole in it, it would be foolish to sew a new patch of cloth on it. Obviously, when it was washed, the new patch would shrink, but the old cloth would stay the same. Rrrrrriipp! That was just good common sense back then. It would have ruined the

new patch and the old garment. But let's take a deeper look from just the surface meaning. What is Jesus teaching?

Personal application: Jesus doesn't just patch up your old life; He gives you a new life!

In this parable, the old garment was the Old Testament—the Old Covenant, what we would call "the law." Jesus was saying He didn't just come to improve the Old Covenant—He came to replace it with something totally new. There was no way His new covenant could be used to "patch up" the old one. The Pharisees were threatened by this because their religion was based upon keeping the law instead of living under grace.

Some people think they're pretty good and only need Jesus to just "patch up" some problem areas of their lives. Most men love duct tape. Someone said that all a man need to be happy is duct tape and WD-40. If it moves and shouldn't, use the duct tape. If it doesn't move and should, use the WD-40. But the truth is Jesus didn't come to put duct tape on your heart. He came to give you a new heart.

When Jesus comes into your life, His goal is not to reform you. His purpose is to *transform* you. We are all sinners by nature and by choice. To try to "fix" our sinful character is like sewing a new un-shrunk patch on an old garment—rrrrriiiiiipp! In our first birth (physical) we were deformed by sin. That's why Jesus says we need a new birth (spiritual). The Bible says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:17)

A hillbilly mother had nine or ten children. One of her boys fell down on a new blacktop road and was covered in tar. He was a mess. His mother was outside trying to clean the sticky tar off of him and said, "I declare, Tom, it would be easier just have another one than to clean you up!" That's like us. Jesus doesn't just try to clean our old hearts up; He gives us a new heart.

3. NEW WINE WILL CRACK OLD WINESKINS

We use bottles to hold wine today but in the Jesus' time, wine was most often stored in goatskins. These skins were removed and scraped clean on the inside and then tanned over a fire. Then the skin was stitched back together, with the neck of the goatskin becoming the neck of the wineskin. A fresh wineskin was soft and supple. When new wine was poured into it, gas was released from the process of fermentation. The new wineskin would stretch to accommodate this expansion.

This parable is funny, because Jesus is insinuating only an idiot would put new wine in an old wineskin. Everyone listening probably rolled with laughter because they knew what would happen. An old wineskin already expanded and hardened from its original supply of wine. It stopped expanding and became rigid. It was hilarious to imagine the result of pouring new wine into an old wineskin. Over a period of just a few days there would be an audible sound as the hardened skin began to crack and split. The wine was expanding but the old skin was too rigid to change its shape. The old skin couldn't stretch because it had become inflexible and soon the stitches would start to pop. You can almost hear the old wineskin stretching and straining until

“pop!” the seams burst open and the new wine leaked out and is lost. A thirsty person would be denied drink if they made this mistake. What is Jesus teaching here?

Personal application: Beware of a hardened heart that refuses to accept new revelations of truth from God’s Word.

The religious whiners of Jesus’ day didn’t like His teaching because it was so revolutionary. It was new. He said things they never heard before. His new teaching shocked and offended them. The religious leaders could not handle this new wine Jesus was offering. They were like the inflexible old wineskins. Their attitudes were “If it is new, it can’t be true!” Every time Jesus said or did something new you could almost hear the sound of straining and stretching until “pop!”—so they killed the messenger instead of accepting the message.

Human nature rebels against the idea of anything that seems to threaten the “good old days” and the “good old ways.” Our motto is “If it’s not broke, don’t fix it.” Jesus compares that attitude to an old wineskin and He is actually saying, “If you don’t fix it, you’ll break!”

The modern Missions movement wasn’t launched until 200 years ago. At the time, the idea of sending Christian missionaries to other countries was radical. When a young English shoemaker, named William Carey studied the maps of the travels of Captain Cook, he became burdened for the millions of people in these lands to know Christ. He became a minister and studied foreign languages. He went to a religious convention and dared to stand up and ask this question: “Is the Great Commission binding on us to take the gospel to foreign nations?” An older minister rebuked him saying, “Sit down, young man. When God pleases to covert the heathen, He will do it without your aid and mine!” It was like pouring new wine into old wineskins, but William Carey traveled to India to share Jesus. Today, every missionary considers William Carey the father of Modern Missions.

Jesus was addressing an attitude that resists change or anything new. We all have a tendency to reject a new idea, or a new revelation of truth because we like the old too much. This was the Pharisees’ attitude and it is an attitude we need to guard against. Like an old, stiff wineskin, our hearts and minds can calcify until we become so inflexible we can’t accept change. When someone introduces “new wine” to us, we crack and split and make a mess. The Bible issues a strong warning to us about the danger of a hardened heart: “So, as the Holy Spirit says: ‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert, where your fathers tested and tried me and for forty years saw what I did.’” (Hebrews 3:7-9)

When faced with the new idea of going into Canaan and taking the land they said, “No. We like the old wine better.” And God said, “Okay, then you’re going to take another lap around Mt. Sinai...and another...and another.” For forty years they wandered in the old paths, eating the same old manna. Why? Because they refused to accept the new wine of God’s plan.

What kind of person are you? Are you like an old wineskin? Have you become molded into a certain mental state or emotional disposition and you aren’t going to change for anything? Throughout my thirty years of ministry I have encountered hundreds of Christians who are like

old wineskins. Whenever any new idea or concept is introduced, they don't like it. It may be a new building program, a new schedule, a new budget, a new program, a new method—you name it. You can almost hear them "straining, and cracking, until 'pop!'" they blow a stitch and express their anger and opposition. Why? Because they have become inflexible, like old wineskins.

One of my favorite poets is Edgar Albert Guest. He wrote a little poem called "The Whiners."

I don't mind the man with a red-blooded kick
At a real or a fancied wrong;
I can stand for the chap with a grouch, if he's quick
To drop it when joy comes along;
I have praise for the fellow who says what he thinks,
Though his thoughts may not fit in with mine;
But spare me from having to mix with the ginks
Who go through this world with a whine.

I am willing to listen to sinner or saint
Who is willing to fight for his rights,
And there's something sometimes in an honest complaint
That the soul of me really delights.
For kickers are useful and grouches are wise,
For their purpose is frequently fine;
But spare me from having to mix with the guys
Who go through this world with a whine.

("The Whiners," Edgar Albert Guest, *Detroit Free Press*, 1917)

CONCLUSION

So what is God saying to you? Do you need to stop acting like the Christian life is a funeral—and start celebrating because we are espoused to a bridegroom who is coming back soon? Do you need to stop trying to patch up your old life, and allow Jesus to put the new robe of righteousness on you? There's plenty of new wine Jesus is providing. Have you stopped growing? Have you stopped changing? Have you become like an old, crusty, wineskin?

I grew up in Alabama, which has more bigoted rednecks per capita than any other state (except maybe Mississippi, where Mike is from). Now Alabamians don't want outsiders saying that, but as a native Alabamian, I can say it. I was exposed to this in the first church I served out of seminary in Central Alabama. I led our little church to purchase a 15-passenger van to pick up children in a trailer park to bring them to Sunday School.

One Sunday morning, they picked up two young black children who were waiting with their friends to ride the van. When I got to my office Vernon was standing there waiting for me. Vernon was one of our four deacons and was our Sunday School Director. He was an old man, probably in his 50s, and I was only 26 years old. Vernon's face was red, his skin was flushed,

and he was actually sweating. He said, "We can't have those ('n' word deleted) coming to our church—either they go or I go!"

What was happening? His wineskin was popping—and when your wineskin pops, whatever is on the inside comes out...and it's not often pretty. I said, "Vernon, settle down. Let's pray about this." He said, "I don't want to pray about it. You'd better do something about it. Either they go or I go." As a young pastor I was frightened and unsure of what to say. Finally, I said, "Vernon, what do you think Jesus would do about these children?" He stomped out of my office, got in his pickup and drove off. He was one mad old wineskin. He just couldn't accept the truth that red, and yellow, black, and white, they are precious in His sight.

I didn't hear from Vernon on Monday, but on Tuesday evening he came knocking on the door of our parsonage, looking terrible. He looked like he hadn't slept in days. A busted wineskin is not a pretty sight. He sat down and this big old man said with tears, "I've been thinking about what you said. I know that Jesus would accept those children whatever the color of their skin, so I just want you to know that I've decided that I'm going to accept them too. I'm sorry for what I said last Sunday."

What happened with Vernon? Right before my very eyes I saw an old hard wineskin soften up and become like a fresh wineskin. That is a beautiful sight. You may not die from hardening of the arteries but you can sure suffer from hardening of the attitudes!

So God forbid that any of us should be old whiners—let's be new wineskins!

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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