

INTRODUCTION

In this message we are exposed to the first of 24 parables contained in Luke's gospel. A parable is a profound teaching tool that Jesus utilized frequently. Our word "parable" is a transliteration of the actual Greek word, *parabolé*. The word comes from two words: *para*, meaning "alongside" and *bole*, meaning "to throw." A parable is where someone offers a story or a description and then the listener "throws down alongside" the story a deeper meaning. In other words, parables are stories that contain additional truth below the surface. As I have said previously: There is a parable in every miracle and a miracle in every parable. The "miracle" of a parable is that on the surface it appears to be a simple story - but there are always several levels of truth associated with it. Whenever you study a parable of Jesus, it's much like peeling an onion. An onion has several layers of covering. The outer peel is like the natural truth of the story, but when you peel away that layer, there are several other layers of truth to be found. For those of you who enjoy studying figures of speech, a parable is considered to be a short allegory. In this passage, Jesus is going to use a powerful metaphor, in the form of a wedding celebration. Then he is going to offer two short parables. One is about a patch of cloth and the other is about wineskins. That's why I have entitled this message "Parties, Patches and Wineskins."

Luke 5:33-39. 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." Jesus answered, "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." [That's the metaphor] He told 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. 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. No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins. And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for he says, 'the old is better.'"

It's important to remember that all of the Bible is inspired by God. It is a miracle book because the truth contained in the Bible is timeless. In other words, what Jesus had to say applied to those people living 2000 years ago, and it applies just as powerfully to us today. As we examine these three topics, I want to introduce each one with a personal question that Jesus answers. Then I want to peel away three layers of truth. First we will peel away the surface truth, which is the natural story of the metaphor or parable. After we remove that layer, we'll examine the spiritual truth below the surface. This layer applies to the people who were the immediate audience of Jesus 2000 years ago. Those first two layers are fairly painless, because they don't really apply to us. The third layer is the personal truth; it's the core of truth. It examines what God is saying to you and me. It's the most uncomfortable level; that's why many preachers never venture onto that level. It's dangerous preaching because personal truth often offends people. Religious people crucified Jesus because His truth offended them. Just remember: It's like peeling an onion—and you don't start crying until you get several layers down! The first question is:

I. SHOULD I BE SOMBER OR JOYFUL?

Jesus' critics watched the way His disciples acted at Matthew's Salvation Party and they were offended. These religious snobs equated spirituality with suffering. The more pained expression you carried on your face, the more holy you were. This strange spiritual masochism still prevails today. Some religions require people to deface their bodies or walk on hot coals or sit on a bed of needles. They associate pain with purity. I've read of the scores of people who walk on bloodied knees for many miles just to pray in a certain church. In this what Jesus taught? Is the correct spiritual disposition somberness and suffering or joy and gladness?

These suffering Pharisees pointed out that the disciples of John the Baptist fasted (true) and the Pharisees fasted but Jesus' disciples partied. To say the Pharisees fasted was a grave understatement! Not only did they fast but they fasted two days per week. But they were fasting for the wrong reason. They were doing it simply as an outward display of their goodness, in other words they weren't fasting for God's sake; they were fasting to be seen by others.

We know from studying some of the rabbinical writings that the Pharisees would fast from sunrise to sunset on Tuesdays and Thursdays, about twelve hours. They often put limestone dust or ashes on their faces and in their hair. They wore sackcloth (burlap) and sucked their cheeks so as to appear gaunt and emaciated—"holy" in other words. They "fasted" to show off how good they were and they expected the same kind of behavior from Jesus and His disciples.

Fasting itself is a wonderful spiritual discipline. Jesus fasted and prayed often but it wasn't a ritual designed for others to see. When you examine the Old Testament, there is only *one* day a year when Jews were commanded to fast, Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. But these Pharisees took a wonderful act of spiritual discipline and changed it into a badge of super-self-righteousness. In answering their criticism, Jesus employed a powerful metaphor. Let's "peel the onion" and see what He was saying. First, consider the

1. SURFACE TRUTH: A Jewish wedding is a scene of celebration

I've been to some great weddings and wedding receptions in my 30 years of ministry. But from what I have discovered from studying Jewish literature, our most elaborate, festive weddings seem dull compared to Jewish weddings. First of all, the wedding was the climax of a year of betrothal. That time of expectation and planning was much more involved than our engagement period. Second, there was a week of eating, dancing, singing and celebrating at the home of the groom's father following the wedding. In America, couples leave immediately for the honeymoon after the wedding. After the reception, the fun is over for most of the family and friends.

In Jewish weddings, the groom and bride were treated like a king and queen. They were even given garland crowns to wear during the weeklong celebration. There was food, drink, dancing, music and plenty of fun for an entire week. It was the best week of their lives and the friends of the bridegroom did some serious partying. That's the surface truth so let's peel off a layer and go deeper to the

2. SPIRITUAL TRUTH: The disciples of Jesus celebrated the presence of the bridegroom

When these straight-laced, religious party-poopers challenged Jesus and His disciples' behavior, He made an amazing comparison. He claimed to be like a bridegroom and His disciples like the guests at a wedding celebration. That's why they acted happy instead of somber. It was time to celebrate!

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? That leads us a level deeper into this metaphor. Notice:

3. PERSONAL TRUTH: When you are aware of the presence of Jesus, you will rejoice, even when you are fasting privately

I've been observing Christians closely for many years and I have found there is a large herd of modern "Pharisees" in the church today. Some people still agree with the Pharisees that the more miserable you look in church, the more "holy" you are.

I love Cindy's dad, J.R. When I was a college student, I worked in her home church as the Music and Youth Minister. I used to give J.R. a hard time because outside the church, he was a funny, likeable guy who could tell some of the funniest jokes you ever heard. But when he went into the church building, he put on what I called his "Baptist Holy Look" to take up the offering. Perhaps you've seen it. The "Baptist Holy Look" is an expression somewhere between acid indigestion and a migraine headache. I love J.R. and he has really loosened up through the years but there are still plenty of folks in church who look like they have been weaned on vinegar. They look like they have been drinking dill pickle juice. I've seen more pleasant expressions on a bottle of poison. Where is the *joy* of the Lord?

Where did we get the idea that laughter is not *holy*? Proverbs 17:22 says laughter is good medicine. Some people say, "You've got to be serious." There are times to weep and there are times to laugh and a wise person knows the difference. But life doesn't cease to be serious when you laugh any more than it ceases to be funny when you cry.

Primarily, the Christian life is best characterized by joy. When you are aware of the presence of the Lord with you, you can't help but rejoice. This is the way David described the source of our joy:

You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand." Psalm 16:11.

Ray Stedman writes:

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.

That doesn't mean that we don't encounter suffering. Sure, there is sadness, pain and disappointment. If you compare the Christian life to a song, the melody line is always joy and praise. The harmony line is suffering and pain. Together, our lives are a beautiful song but the melody of *joy* must prevail. Jesus addressed this He said, "In this world you shall have trouble—but take heart! For I have overcome the world!" (John 16:33)

And Jesus didn't tell us not to fast. In fact, He was actually predicting His death in verse 35 when He spoke of the time "when the bridegroom will be taken from them; in those days they will fast." The word "taken" means to be "ripped away violently." Jesus was saying after His brutal death, His followers would fast but never like the Pharisees fasted. Remember, these Pharisees whitened their faces and piled ashes on their hair and moaned and groaned so everyone would *know* they were "spiritual." In Matthew 6:16-18 Jesus gave these instructions, "When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting...when you fast, put oil on you head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father."

Are you more like the Pharisees or the disciples of Jesus? Is there real joy in your life? If someone closely observed your life for a month would they say, "I want what that person has?" Here's the next question that Jesus answers:

II. CAN I COME TO CHRIST AND STAY THE SAME?

The beautiful thing about Jesus' use of parables is that He used some of the most common, simple ideas to communicate deep spiritual truth. He talked about sewing a new piece of cloth onto an old garment. Let's take only a brief moment to "peel the onion," starting at the

1. SURFACE TRUTH: New cloth sewn on old cloth will rip the old

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 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. Rrrriiiiiipp. That was just common good sense back then. It would have ruined the new patch *and* the old garment. Now let's look a level deeper:

2. SPIRITUAL TRUTH: Jesus didn't come to "patch up" the Old Covenant

Jesus' immediate audience knew what He was talking about. The old garment was the Old Testament, or 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 new Age of Grace had dawned. John said it well when he wrote, "The law was given by Moses [that's the Old]; but grace and truth [that's the new] came through Jesus Christ." (John 1:17) Jesus came to institute an entire new system of faith—and His enemies didn't like it.

Now, let's take it a layer deeper to find

3. PERSONAL TRUTH: Jesus comes into your life to create something totally new!

Some people think they are pretty good and only need Jesus to come and "patch up" their lives. I remember growing up as a kid in South Alabama and hearing that really bad kids who committed crimes were sent to reform school. Through the years I met a few of the guys who spent some time at reform school and I can't remember a single one who was truly "reformed." Most of them were still as mean as a snake.

I heard the story of a hillbilly mother who 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. She 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.

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 – rrrriiiiiipp! In our first birth (physical) we were deformed by sin. That's why Jesus says we need a new birth (spiritual).

2 Corinthians. 5:17 says, "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"

Jesus deepens this parable about old and new by talking about wine in wineskins. Here is the question He is addressing

III. DO I HAVE TO ACCEPT NEW IDEAS? I LIKE THE OLD ONES!

Again, let's remove the different layers of meaning in this parable:

1. SURFACE TRUTH: New wine in old wineskins will crack and burst them

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.

Jesus often employed subtle Jewish humor in his teaching, anything that was silly or foolish was comical. (Like straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel.) 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 new 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 do you think Jesus is implying? Let's go a little deeper to the

2. SPIRITUAL TRUTH: The Christian life is a constant flow of new ideas, new methods, and new revelations of truth

The religious snobs 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. He did things they never saw before—he ate and drank with sinners! In our next passage—horror of horrors—His disciples picked and ate grain on the Sabbath. 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.

It's a dangerous condition when a person's mind loses the ability to be stretched. To ever stop learning or being open to new revelations of truth is a hazardous spiritual condition. Jesus Himself recognized it is much more comfortable and pleasant to stick with the "old ways." That's why He said in verse 39, "no one drinking the old wine wants the new, for he says, 'the old is better.'" Jesus wasn't making a judgement about the superiority of aged wine; He was making an observation about human nature. We like new cars, new houses and new toys, but we don't like new ways, new ideas or new truth. Nobody enjoys change. We all enjoy our normal "routines." We like to sit in the same seat at church every Sunday. Routines become habits and habits become ruts—and a rut is nothing but a grave with both ends kicked out.

Human nature rebels against the idea of anything that seems to threaten the "good old days" and the "good old ways." But the truth of this parable is clear: Jesus came to bring the new. He is the

New Patch; He is the New Wine. God loves new things. We enter the Christian life through a new birth, we become a new creation, we walk in newness of life, we read a New Testament and one day God will create a new heaven and a new earth. One of the last things Jesus is recorded as saying in the last chapter of this book, "Behold, I make all things new." (Revelation 21:5)

Yeah, but we still like the 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!"

This attitude of resisting new truth is nothing new. It was present during Jesus' time and it has always characterized human history. When Galileo invented a crude telescope and began to study the stars, he dared to introduce the radical new idea that perhaps the earth was not the center of the universe. In fact, he was so brazen as to suggest the earth actually rotated around the sun rather than the sun circling the earth. Heresy! It was like pouring new wine into old wineskins. In 1633 he was put on trial as a heretic. He was found guilty and placed under permanent house arrest. Why couldn't the religious leaders of the inquisition accept this "new idea?" Because "the old wine is better." They were old wineskins and they couldn't accept the new wine.

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.

Can you tell where we are headed with this? Let's talk about you and me. Here is the

3. PERSONAL TRUTH: If you become inflexible and harden your heart, accepting new ideas will be difficult and painful

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: Hebrews 3:15 says, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion." The children of Israel refused to go into the Promised Land. They became lazy because God fed them manna and they didn't have to fight any battles. 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.

Several years ago, when I suggested we dress casually during the summer months, you would have thought I changed the words in John 3:16! It was a new idea. Some people still don't think you can worship unless you are dressed to the nines: Could that be an old wineskin? And to move the Sunday night service to a Monday night? You could almost hear the cracking of wineskins all across Tyler! Different worship styles, a variety of music, different methods...the list goes on and on. How flexible are you? I like the extra beatitude that says, "Blessed are the flexible for they shall not be bent out of shape."

Would you go to a doctor who only practiced the medicine and procedures used 40 years ago? The amazing thing to remember about old wineskins is that at one time they were new wineskins and they were flexible enough to expand. As I get older it seems to me that it becomes harder and harder for me to accept new ideas and methods. It's as if the mind loses the ability to stretch. We get to the point where we suspect everything new and different. This is exactly what Jesus was warning against.

Dr. Alfred Plummer, commenting on this verse, writes: "The prejudiced person will not even try the new, or admit that it has any merits. He knows that the old is pleasant, and it suits him; and that is enough, because he is not going to change." (International Critical Commentary, Luke, p. 165)

We need to be open to new ideas, new methods and new revelations of truth. Now, there really isn't any new truth, but unless you already know everything there is to know, there should always be room for you to learn new revelations of that truth.

Sadly, we like the old wine, the old ways. The people God has always blessed most have been those who have guarded against become like old hard wineskins. Rudyard Kipling once accompanied General William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army to a foreign country. They were met by a group of Christians who were dancing and playing tambourines. Kipling, a proper young Englishman, was shocked by this activity. His orthodox soul resented the dancing and tambourines and he expressed his displeasure to General Booth. Booth replied, "Young man, if I thought I could win one more soul for Christ by standing on my head and beating a tambourine with my feet, I would learn how to do it."

CONCLUSION

Parties, patches, and wineskins: 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 is plenty of new wine Jesus is providing. Have you stopped growing? Have you stopped changing? Have you become like an old, crusty, wineskin?

I remember a deacon in the first church I pastored out of seminary. This was deep in the heart of Alabama. The church bought a van and started picking up some kids from a trailer park to bring them to Sunday School. One Sunday morning, we picked up two little black children who were waiting with their friends to ride the van. When I got to my office this man, his face red and his skin flushed—he was actually sweating, 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." I prayed with him and then the only thing the Lord gave me to say to him was, "Vernon, what do you think Jesus would do about these children?" He stomped out of my office, one mad old wineskin.

On Thursday of that same week he was knocking on the door of our parsonage, looking terrible. 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'm going to accept them and love them. I'm sorry for what I said last Sunday."

What happened? 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!

OUTLINE

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2. *Spiritual:* The disciplines of Jesus celebrated the presence of the bridegroom
3. *Personal:* When you are aware of the presence of Jesus, you will rejoice, even when you are fasting privately.

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II. CAN I COME TO CHRIST AND STAY THE SAME?

1. *Surface:* New cloth sewn on old cloth will rip the old
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Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! 2
Corinthians 5:17

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"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion." *Hebrews 3:15*



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes