

New wine must be poured into new wine skins (New Year's Day)

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[0 : 00] I'd like to look with you at some words that we read there earlier in Luke chapter 5, verse 38.

These words, new wine must be poured into new wineskins. New wine must be poured into new wineskins. New wine needs new wineskins.

New wine for a new year. Some of us may look back at 2023 with fondness, even with nostalgia. But as they say, nostalgia ain't what it used to be.

But others of us may look back on the year that's gone with memories of sad and difficult times.

That's true in our own case as a family. But maybe we're all hoping that the new year will be better.

New wine needs new wineskins. For many of us, for 2024 to be a good new year, we will need radical change. New wine needs new wineskins.

[1 : 15] Jesus used this very homely example from his time to illustrate the radical nature of himself and his work. New wine required new leather wineskins.

If new fermenting wine was put into old, worn, cracked wineskins, it would burst the wineskins and the wine would be lost.

I don't think we grasp how radically new Jesus was and is. We're so familiar with the gospel stories like the prodigal son or the good Samaritan.

And they've become part of our literary heritage like Shakespeare or Robert Burns. They become part of our religious landscape. We don't realize how shocking Jesus was to his contemporaries.

There was a book written about modern art, I think back about 1980, called *The Shock of the New*.

And that's the way that Jesus' contemporaries felt. *The Shock of the New*.

[2 : 14] This was something new, revolutionary, radical. Some people liked it. Some people hated it. First, we see the astonishment of the ordinary people in their reaction to Jesus.

When they heard Jesus teach, they said, He speaks with authority. Not like the scribes and teachers of the law who said, well, there's this authority. This is what the Word of God says.

This is what our tradition says. And so on. But Jesus said, truly I say to you. And many of the

ordinary people heard Him gladly. Some who were sent to arrest Jesus went back empty-handed to their leaders and said, never man spoke like this man.

This was something new, something revolutionary. Think also of their reaction to people on the other side of the Sea of Galilee when Jesus crossed over there and He met this poor, wretched

man who was infested by thousands of demons.

He called himself Legion because of that. And Jesus cast them out. And He was sitting there clothed in His right mind. And all the people of the region came to look and see.

[3 : 29] And they were astonished. But were they delighted? No. They asked Jesus to leave. They were afraid. Why were they afraid? What was wrong? Because Jesus had freed this poor, wretched man by casting the demons into a herd of 2,000 pigs.

And to those people of that area, the monetary value of 2,000 pigs was far more important than this poor, wretched man. But not in Jesus' world. And think of Jesus' hometown of Nazareth.

When Jesus got up and read from Isaiah in the synagogue and started to preach, the people were amazed.

They said, this is the carpenter. Where has he got this from? And then Jesus went on to speak about the days of Elijah and Elisha when God sent help, not to the people of Israel, but to an outsider like the Naaman the Syrian, or to a widow, a part of Tyre and Sidon.

And the people were offended. And they wanted to kill Jesus. They were furious. These were the kind of reactions that even amongst the ordinary people there were to Jesus.

[4 : 50] Because this was something different, radical, revolutionary, new. This was the new wine that Jesus speaks of. But supremely, of course, there was a prejudice of the religious leaders.

Think of Nicodemus, who was quite kindly disposed towards Jesus. He came to see him at night. He was interested in him. But when Jesus said, you must be born again, he said, how can this be? He couldn't take it in. This was new wine. This was too heady. This was too powerful for him. Or think of the Samaritan woman that Jesus met by the well. She spoke out of that background of what the religious leaders of the day said.

Jesus had simply asked her for a drink. And she said, she said, how can you ask me for a drink? You're a Jew and I'm a Samaritan woman. There were all these social and religious barriers between them.

It was revolutionary to her mind. In the end, she grasped what it was all about. But that was the immediate reaction. And that's the way that people reacted to Jesus so often. Here in this passage, we see this about eating and drinking.

[5 : 59] The Son of Man came eating and drinking, Jesus says in chapter 7 of Luke's Gospel. And the people said, he's a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.

We see the same thing in this passage. Or they accused him of breaking the Sabbath. In this passage again, chapter 6. The disciples walking through the cornfields picked ears of corn, rubbed them in their hands, and ate them on the Sabbath day.

And their accuser said, ah, you're breaking the law. You're harvesting. You're reaping. You're making bread. All on the Sabbath day. Or when Jesus made this man with the handicapped hand stand before them, he asked, is it right to do good or to do evil on the Sabbath day?

And when he healed the man, they were furious. And they wanted to do away with Jesus. But above all, it was his claims, was it not?

Here in this passage again, in chapter 5, verse 20, he said to the handicapped man who was lowered down through the hole in the roof down in front of him, what a mess there must have been there. But Jesus was quite unperturbed.

[7 : 13] But did he say to the man, first of all, you're healed of your paralysis? No. He said, your sins are forgiven. Because he saw right to the heart of that man's real problems.

And then when he demonstrated that it was as easy for him to forgive all that man's sins as to heal his handicap, the people again, the religious leaders, were angry.

Who can forgive sins but God alone? They were right. Nobody can forgive all somebody's sins but God alone. I can forgive you sin if you sin against me and whatnot, but I can't forgive all your sins. But God can. They were quite right about that. But they were wrong in their conclusion. Their conclusion was, here is a man trying to make himself God. It's blasphemy.

But Jesus constantly said such things. He said, before Abraham was, I am. Taking again the very Old Testament name Jehovah. I am. I and the Father are one, he said.

[8 : 24] When asked at his trial by the high priest, putting him on the spot, are you the son of the blessed one? The name of God was so holy in those days they wouldn't pronounce the name of God.

Are you the son of the blessed one? And again Jesus says, and this is in Mark's Gospel, chapter 14, quite categorically he says, I am. Either people had to accept that or reject it.

And these religious leaders rejected it. Instead of changing their views of Jesus, they accused him of blasphemy. But Jesus' attitudes, not just in these areas, but in every area, were so revolutionary. His attitude to children. His attitude to women. His attitude to the poor and despised and rejected. Revolutionary in his time. We don't realize how revolutionary all this is because Jesus' influence has been so great in our Western world.

His attitude to wealth and power that these things were not the ultimate important things. Just about everything about Jesus was new and radical and revolutionary.

[9 : 36] Unsettling and shocking. Is that the way that his church is perceived today? Or does the church just echo the values of the world?

If that's the case, there's something far wrong. Because Jesus is sending us into the world just as the Father sent him.

And the Father sent him as a new wine. To be this radical, revolutionary changer of people's hearts and lives. I want to look with you at this new, revolutionary, innovative nature of Jesus' mission. As it's our paradigm, our blueprint, our pattern for our thinking, our lives, and our mission. First thing I want to notice is that Jesus was people-focused, not regulation-focused.

Relationships are far more important than regulations to Jesus. As we see that here in this passage. This whole business about Jesus' disciples and not fasting and so on.

[10:47] Jesus considered having fellowship around a meal was more important than showing off how spiritual you were by fasting. Or this whole business about the Sabbath. Jesus considered the well-being of his disciples and the well-being of a handicapped man more important than man-made regulations about the Sabbath.

There was no stipulation in the Old Testament that the disciples weren't allowed to pick ears of corn, rub them in their hands, and eat them on the Sabbath day. That was this kind of hedge of rules that the Pharisees and others put around the gospel.

Around the law of God. An example of someone being people-focused comes from a very surprising source. There was a man called Pastor Jack Glass who was, in his day, a kind of notorious extreme Protestant and was viewed a sectarian.

Well, the Pope visited Glasgow and there was a big meeting in Bella Houston Park to welcome the Pope. And, of course, Jack Glass was there protesting against the visit of the Pope because he disagreed with the Pope's theology.

But in the great crowds that were there trying to get into Bella Houston Park, there was one lady in a wheelchair who was trying to get across the street into Bella Houston Park.

[12:11] And the only person who noticed her was Jack Glass. And he went and he took the wheelchair and he wheeled her across the road into Bella Houston Park.

In other words, he was people-focused in spite of what his theology was or what interpretation he may have put on things or he may have been viewed as being anti-Catholic.

He was people-focused. Here was a person in need. He showed love to his neighbor. That's what it means to be people-focused. Our mission will not succeed unless we too are people-focused, seeking to build relationships and show Christ's love.

Because reaching the lost is more important than my private religiosity. Fasting is about trying to improve our relationship with God, focusing on prayer, mourning for sin.

And it can be a good thing in certain circumstances, as Jesus said. When there was a time when the bridegroom would be taken from them, they would fast. There would be a time of mourning. But when this kind of spirituality is treated as the most important thing, it fails.

[13:20] Leonard Cohen, the great singer-songwriter, at one point in his life, he became a Buddhist monk. He was kind of fed up with the world. He became a Buddhist monk.

But that didn't stop him womanizing and drinking whiskey with his guru. It didn't work. And it was the same in the Middle Ages, so often, with the failure of monasticism.

People found either they couldn't keep the vows or they pretended to keep the vows. And even when they did keep the vows, it didn't bring them peace and satisfaction. Think of Martin Luther. He tried everything to find peace with God.

But in the end, he found that it was only through being justified by faith in Christ alone that he found peace and satisfaction.

The Apostle Paul speaks of this in Colossians chapter 2. He says, Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of the world, why, as though you still belong to it, do you submit to its rules? Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch.

[14:21] Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom with their self-imposed worship, their false humility, and their harsh treatment of the body. But they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

Jesus viewed eating and drinking with sinners as more important than a false, proud asceticism. Because his purpose was to seek and to save the lost.

And that's our purpose as Christians and as a Christian church. That's why we're in the world. Let's follow Jesus' example. Have we been guilty of sometimes making our religiosity an excuse for not engaging in mission and being people-focused?

Second thing we see about Jesus is that it was communication-driven, not conservation-driven. The Pharisees and others viewed their mission as conserving what they had.

Now, conserving can be a good thing if what you're conserving is good. But if what you're conserving is not good, then it's not a good thing, is it? Conservation in itself is not necessarily good.

[15:31] One thing they wanted to do was to protect themselves from contamination by sinners. So, so many things were built as a kind of wall around them so that they wouldn't come in touch with sinful, evil people.

They also tried to protect the law by the addition of a hedge around it, multiplying rules to try to protect God's law. Those religious leaders also tried to protect the temple. People were not even allowed to bring their own sacrifices or to bring their own money. They had to change their money. They had to buy the animals that the temple authorities had prepared. And that's why Jesus drove out those money changers and all the animals from the temple. Because He said, God has made this house a house of prayer for all the nations, and you made it a den of thieves.

Didn't make them very popular. And above all, they just wanted to maintain the status quo. Now, again, if the status quo is good, that's fine.

[16:34] But if it's oppressive, that's wrong. By contrast, Jesus was concerned with breaking down the barriers and reaching people, communicating. He went where people were.

The streets, the seaside, hillsides, fields, houses, dinner parties. He didn't stay in the synagogues and the temple. He went to the synagogue and temple, of course.

But He went everywhere where people were. He broke down the barriers between Himself and others, like the Samaritan woman we mentioned earlier. No one of His race and of His religious standing would have had anything to do with such a woman.

Yet He engages her in conversation. Or the sinful woman who came and washed His feet with her tears, dried them with her hair.

Or the tax collectors like Levi. He goes to His house and mixes with them all. And of course, Jesus also used a huge variety of approaches.

[17:44] Innovative methodology. He used dialogue. He used conversation. He used visual aids. Like when people were saying, who should you pay taxes to? He took a coin and said, whose picture's on that?

Caesar's. Well, give to Caesar's. What is Caesar's? And give to God's. What is God's? So often Jesus was doing surprising things like that. And He used, of course, story and parable and even drama, like when He wrote on the ground, when people were accusing this woman of being caught in adultery.

Jesus even used silence. Jesus had nothing to say to this man who was totally insincere.

It's one of the most chilling passages in the whole of the Bible. Jesus had nothing to say to him.

May that day never come when Jesus has nothing to say to us.

May we respond to His word and His invitation now. So, Jesus' great concern was communication. He came as a witness to the truth. And that must be our great concern, too.

[19:05] It may be in simple ways, like Jesus. That's conversation, debate, preaching. But Jesus set as a pattern, the new wine of the gospel must be put into new wineskins for every age, for each new situation.

We mentioned Martin Luther already. He used the printing press and his hymns to spread the message of the gospel. The Reformation got people reading and singing. And then there was the age of mass evangelism.

There was Whitefield and Wesley, who preached to tens of thousands of people out in the fields, because they weren't allowed to preach in the churches.

Then there was the age of D.L. Moody, and more recently, Billy Graham. And, of course, so often, that kind of thing was criticized. But Moody once said, when he was being criticized, he said, I prefer the way I do evangelism to the way that you don't do it.

A very telling criticism, was it not? Today, of course, we have to consider new methods, whether it's information technology, the Internet, drama, film, music, alongside the more central methods of preaching and personal witnessing.

[20:17] We must be open to it. New wine needs new wineskins. But third and finally, for Jesus, transforming people was what was important, not changing the message.

This is his priority. New wine needed new wineskins. Jesus and the good news will not fit into our old preconceptions.

This is what the Pharisees realized. They knew that what Jesus was and what he was saying would not fit in with their worldview, so they rejected him. At least they were honest.

But so many people try to make Jesus somehow fit in with their ideas. Even the disciples, Peter, remember, couldn't accept what Jesus said about the fact he was going to die.

May it never be, Lord. May that never happen. And Jesus had to rebuke him. And Jesus rebuked him with one of the most serious rebukes there is in Scripture.

[21 : 28] He said, get behind me, Satan. Why did he do that? Because for Jesus, his death was fundamental to the whole Christian gospel. This is the new wine.

Remember, Jesus at the Last Supper took the cup of wine and he said, This cup is the new covenant in my blood, poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Many people find this whole emphasis upon the blood of Jesus Christ, the cross, the death of Christ, as being something we don't want to mention today.

That's not very nice. That's not something that's going to help people. Jesus says it's absolutely fundamental, because what he was doing there upon the cross was paying the price of our sin, taking the evil of the world upon himself so that we might be forgiven.

So, there's a tendency, you see, to try to make Jesus fit into our lives by cutting him down to size, by changing his message.

[22 : 33] And this is a process that has been going on for over 150 years in the Western world. If the virgin birth or the atonement or the resurrection won't fit in with our worldview, then cut them out.

If Jesus' teaching about marriage won't fit, cut it out. If Jesus teaches most clearly about the reality of hell, cut it out.

People have taken the bits of Jesus and the gospel that they like and tried to fit these into their lives. I saw this recently on Facebook.

Ten attributes of the woke mind. It included things like, you're willing to change your mind when new information becomes available. You believe in true equality for all people.

You have empathy. You embrace cooperation. You respect others' rights. You care for the planet.

As the historian Tom Holland has pointed out, these kind of values have their roots in the Christianity that influenced the Western world.

[23 : 42] They did not exist prior to that in the world of the Roman Empire or in the pagan world. Think of those values here. You're willing to change your mind.

That's literally what repentance is. You believe in true equality for all people. God has said that we are all made in the image of God. You have empathy.

Who had more empathy than Jesus? And more than empathy, he had compassion, where his love reached out to help and to change people. You embrace cooperation, he said.

Love one another as I have loved you. You respect others' rights, he said. Love your neighbor as yourself. You care for the planet. God is the creator and he has given us this creation to be looked after, not to be despoiled and wrecked and destroyed.

You see, all of these values that people kind of take for granted as what is ethical and moral, they have their roots in Jesus and in his word.

[24 : 46] They didn't exist in the Roman Empire. They didn't exist in the pagan world. So, people take the ethics of Christianity, but without the foundation.

And that will ultimately lead to collapse. Because where does the power and the motivation come from? It doesn't come from the science. It doesn't come from evolution.

It doesn't come from Mother Nature. It doesn't come from the idea that there is nothing but the interactions of material molecules that we are made up of.

None of these things gives an explanation or a motivation as to why we should do those things. Whereas the gospel does. Love one another as I have loved you.

Because you see, this is where it becomes very personal. Jesus says you must be born again. You must repent and believe in him.

[25 : 49] The one who came to give his life as a ransom for many. But we so often transform this glorious gospel into a form of legalism. We take the instructions that Jesus gave about how his people are to live, like love one another.

But we take that as the basis for our acceptance with God. Whereas the reality is, love is the outworking of the new life of faith in the atoning work of Jesus Christ.

As Jesus points out here with the wineskins, all of this is destructive. It's destructive of the gospel, of course. But such legalism is also destructive of ourselves.

It leads either to pride and hypocrisy or it leads to despair. The Pharisees were guilty of pride and hypocrisy, of looking down on others that they thought weren't keeping these laws.

But for many of the common people, it led to despair. Because they knew they couldn't keep these commandments. The truth is, the new Savior, this new revolutionary, radical, innovative Savior, needs new people to receive him.

[27 : 00] But where are those new people going to come from? How can we be made new? Do we have to do something ourselves to make ourselves new? No, of course not. Because we can't do that. We can't change ourselves.

But the good news is that the new Savior is the very one who can make us new. By his great redeeming work. By his regenerating spirit. And by his life-giving word.

He gives us a new heart. A new perspective. A new relationship. Do you feel the need this morning to be made new? Well, Jesus is calling you.

Come to him. Trust in his life and death and rising again for failed and broken people. Just like you and I. Jesus was radical, revolutionary, and innovative.

So often the church has timidly and tragically lagged far behind Jesus. We need to recapture his spirit today.

[28 : 05] If you're a Christian, make this your New Year resolution. Trusting Jesus and his redeeming work, you'll endeavor to follow his example.

If you're not yet a Christian. If you're not yet a Christian. If you're not yet a Christian. Or perhaps you're unsure as to where you stand. Grasp this. You cannot fit Jesus into your present preconceptions and lifestyle.

Something has got to give. Either you will try to cut Jesus down to fit in with you, which will be disastrous. Or else you'll realize that you must ask him to make you a new creation, which will lead you to glory.

A number of years ago now, Dylan sang these words. Surrender your crown on this bloodstained ground.

Take off your mask. He sees your deeds. He knows your needs, even before you ask. How long can you falsify and deny what is real? How long can you hate yourself for the weakness you conceal?

[29 : 10] How long can you fail?

How long can you fail? Lord, we have to confess that so often we have liked what is old because it is ours rather than the new, which is Jesus.

Lord, we pray that you would give us wisdom in applying this truth to our own lives. And we pray that you would work in this world at the present time, which thinks that it knows what Jesus was all about and has either rejected it or has appropriated what is sensible for them.

Oh, Lord, our God, enable people to see Jesus in all his grace and glory and loving kindness and respond to that love.

So, Lord, we pray that you would bless us in this year in which we have entered. Bless us and our families, our friends, our neighbors. Bless us as we seek to influence others, as we seek to converse with others, as we seek to communicate the good news of Jesus Christ.

[30 : 44] And so we ask all of these things in his name and for his sake. Amen. Now we close by singing the hymn to God's praise, Come Behold the Wondrous Mystery.

Let's stand to sing.