

Ever-Fresh Wineskins for Ever-Free Wine

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Preacher: Darrell Johnson

[0 : 00] As we now resume our studies in parables of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke, I invite you to give your attention to the first parable Jesus spoke.

Like his first miracle, his first parable sets the stage for the rest of his ministry. First miracle, turning water into wine at a wedding feast in Cana of Galilee.

First parable, the new wine must be put into new wineskins. In the first miracle, Jesus is showing us that he has come to make all things new.

In the first parable, he is saying that the newness he brings cannot for long be held in any of the categories or institutions we humans devise.

Because of its potency, the new wine does not fit. It does not fit any of the thought forms or behavior patterns we had before he caused the wine to flow.

[1 : 21] Jesus' first parable is found in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 5, verses 33 through 39. But as is the case when you look at any of Jesus' parables, we need to hear and see the parable in the context he originally spoke it.

So we're going to read from Luke 5, verse 17 through 39. All of which, says Luke, took place on one day.

If you are able, would you please stand for the reading of the Gospel? After I read, I will say the word of the Lord.

And if you would like, you can say, thanks be to God. It came about one day that Jesus was teaching. There were some Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting there who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem.

And the power of the Lord was present for him to perform healing. And behold, some men were carrying on a bed a man who was paralyzed. And they were trying to bring him in and to set him down in front of Jesus.

[2 : 38] Not finding any way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and led him down through the tiles with his stretcher, right in the center in front of Jesus.

Seeing their faith, he said, Friend, your sins are forgiven you. The scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, Who is this man who speaks blasphemies?

Who can forgive sins but God alone? Jesus, aware of their reasonings, answered and said to them, Why are you reasoning in your hearts? Which is easier?

To say, Your sins have been forgiven you, or to say, Rise and walk. But in order that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins, he said to the paralytic, I say to you, Rise, take up your stretcher, and go home.

And at once he rose before them and took up what he'd been lying on and went home glorifying God. And they were all seized with astonishment and began glorifying God. And they were filled with fear, saying, We have seen remarkable things today.

[3 : 44] After that, he went out and noticed a tax gatherer named Levi sitting in the tax office. And he said to him, Follow me. And Levi left everything behind and rose and began to follow Jesus.

And Levi gave a big reception for him in his house. And there was a great crowd of tax gatherers and other people who were reclining at table with him. And the Pharisees and their scribes began grumbling at his disciples, saying, Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?

Jesus answered and said to them, It's not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. I've come not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

And they said to him, The disciples of John often fast and offer prayers. The disciples of the Pharisees also do the same. But yours, eat and drink.

Jesus said to them, You cannot make the attendance of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them, can you? But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days.

[4 : 52] And he was also telling them a parable. Well, no one tears a piece from an old garment and puts it on a new garment and puts it on an old garment. Otherwise, he will both tear the new and the piece from the new will not match the old.

And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled out and the skins will be ruined. But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins.

And no one, after drinking old wine, wishes for new, for he says, the old is good enough. The word of the Lord. You may be seated.

Living God, we believe that you enabled Luke, the physician, to remember these events and these words and to write them down faithfully for us. And now I pray in your mercy and grace that you would help us live into the reality of which these words speak as never before.

For we pray it in Jesus' name. Amen. New wine must be put into fresh wineskins.

[6 : 09] Why? Why? Why the must? Why can't we just squeeze Jesus and the new thing that he is bringing into the world into our existing thinking, feeling, acting, and being?

Why the must? Why the must? Why the must? New wine must be put into fresh wineskins. Like so many of the parables of Jesus recorded in Luke, this one also takes place in the context of conflict. conflict with the religious leaders, in particular with the scribes and Pharisees. As we pointed out before, the scribes are the professional theologians, the ecclesiastical lawyers of the day.

The Pharisees are the devoted lay leaders. And together, they are the self-appointed guardians and protectors of Israel's law. And they are the guardians and protectors of the reputation of Israel's God.

And as far as they're concerned, Jesus of Nazareth is violating the law and thereby shaming God's name. Why? Because Jesus is not being religious enough.

[7 : 31] He's not acting the way religious people are supposed to act. For one thing, he's forgiving sinners. He meets sinners, and he immediately extends forgiveness without any appeal to any higher authority.

He just does it. Friend, your sins have been forgiven you before he restores the man's legs. Only God can forgive. The Pharisees respond, Indeed.

And forgiveness is supposed to take place in the temple. And only after you've gone through this elaborate ritual under the authority of designated priests. Jesus is forgiving on his own, away from the temple, right in those places where we live and work and have our being.

And then, Jesus starts calling the wrong people into his movement. Tax collectors, like Levi, also known as Matthew. In the minds of the scribes and Pharisees, tax collectors are triply bad.

Triply bad. They work for the Roman imperialists, so in some people's minds, they're traitors. They fraudulently extort other people, so the rabbis label them as robbers.

[8 : 52] And because of their contact with Gentiles, non-Jews, they were permanently, ritually unclean. Yet Jesus reaches out to tax collectors and calls them into his company.

He grants them the privilege of discipleship with him. And then, he starts to party with them. Levi, Matthew, is so grateful for this unexpected grace that he throws a party for Jesus and he invites all of his other tax collectors to come to the party in hope that they too will meet Jesus.

Jesus parties with traitors, robbers, and the ritually unclean. He eats with them. As we have been discovering, to eat a meal with someone in the Middle East is a much bigger deal than to eat a meal with someone in the West.

To eat a meal with someone in the Middle East signifies total, unconditional acceptance. Eating a meal is an act of intimacy. You're treating your guest as a member of your own family.

Scandal of scandals. Jesus of Nazareth, who many people are already beginning to suspect is the Messiah, the Son of God, Jesus of Nazareth is eating with the wrong people. He's accepting them unconditionally.

[10 : 10] He's treating them as his own brothers and sisters. And at this party, with other tax collectors and sinners, the scribes and Pharisees confront Jesus with the issue that gives him the opportunity to speak his first parable.

They raise the issue of Jesus' own religious devotion. He is simply not religious enough. In particular, Jesus and his disciples are not practicing the discipline of fasting.

John the Baptist and his disciples did. The Pharisees and their disciples did. But not Jesus and his disciples. Jesus is not acting the way religious people are supposed to act. The Pharisees of the first century fasted weekly. The really committed ones would fast twice a week on Monday and Thursday. In that day, to go beyond what was prescribed in the law was held to be the mark of piety.

And to ignore what was in the law was held to be a sign of doubtful devotion. Now, what is important to note is that nowhere in the Old Testament does God require or command weekly fasting.

[11 : 27] Nowhere. There's only one day of commanded fasting and that's on the solemn day of atonement, Yom Kippur, when the high priest would go into the Holy of Holies to atone for the sins of the people.

Yet, by the first century, the practice of fasting had become, for the Pharisees, the sign of religious devotion. Some scholars argue the practice had become nearly obsessive.

Jesus and his disciples are not fasting. So, the religious leaders need to question Jesus about his spirituality. Jesus' response?

It's important to note that he does not put down the practice of fasting. Indeed, in his sermon on the mount, he seems to even assume that those who love God will periodically go without food in order to seek God more intensely and eagerly.

But Jesus' response in this context? He gives them a theologically loaded justification for not doing it. A theologically loaded justification for not doing things the way we've always done them.

[12 : 40] Listen carefully. They're explosive words. Luke 5, 34. Listen. You cannot make the attendance of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is present.

Can you? You cannot make the attendance of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is present. Can you? In the first century, a wedding was one of the happiest occasions in the life of a town or a village.

I'm told that it would last up to a week. People eating and drinking, singing and dancing the whole week. So important were such feasts to the health of villages and towns that the rabbis had a rule. Quote, All in attendance on the bridegroom are relieved of all religious observations which would lessen their joy.

Jesus picks up on this rule in responding to the accusations that he and his disciples are not religious enough.

[13 : 49] He declares that something has happened in the world which the religious folk, which the religious establishment has failed to grasp and which changes everything.

That's something. the bridegroom has come. The bridegroom has come. What did you just say, Jesus?

Are you implying that you are the bridegroom? You? What amazes me is that the scribes and Pharisees do not pick up stones to throw at Jesus at this point.

For you see, in the Old Testament the bridegroom is Yahweh, the living God himself. Isaiah 52. Do not be afraid for you will not be put to shame for your husband is your maker whose name is Yahweh of hosts.

Isaiah 62. It will no longer be said of you forsaken nor to your land will it any longer be said desolate but you will be called my delight is in her and your land married for Yahweh delights in you and to him your land will be married and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride so your God will rejoice over you.

[15 : 01] Hosea chapter 2. God is speaking to unfaithful Israel and God says she went after other lovers but me she forgot therefore I'm going to allure her I will lead her into the desert to speak tenderly to her and that day declares Yahweh you will call me my husband you will no longer call me my master in that day I will make a covenant with you a marriage covenant you cannot make the attendance of the bridegroom fast when the bridegroom is present can you it's a huge declaration on the lips of Jesus Jesus is saying the bridegroom has come and I am he and because I am present everything changes things are going to be different around here now old ways of thinking and feeling and being and acting are going to be set aside and new ways of thinking and feeling and being and acting are going to emerge my disciples the attendance of me the bridegroom are now relieved of all all forms of religion which might lessen their joy dear Jesus is saying because I am here your traditions your habits your rules are all secondary

I am here and I am what now matters by the way do you hear what Jesus is saying about his disciples if he is the bridegroom who is the bride we are as the rest of the story unfolds the first disciples slowly discover that they are not only attendants of Jesus at his party they discover that they and we are his bride at the party the men and women Jesus calls into his company become his bride he is taking tax collectors and sinners as his bride you cannot make the attendance fast when the bridegroom is present can you how much less the bride you cannot make the bride fast when the bridegroom is present can you Jesus does say that one day the party would stop for a while for one day the bridegroom would be taken away this is a violent word that Jesus uses he is referring to that day when violent people will violently seize him and take him to the violence of crucifixion on that day they will fast he says for that day will be a day of sorrow that day will be the great day of atonement the final

Yom Kippur but after that day the party resumes because Jesus promises disciples that he will come back and they will never be without his presence Jesus responds to the charge of not being religious enough on the grounds that something has happened in the world that changes everything he has come his presence is now what matters he not religion is the issue all that matters now is relationship with him which is what he is getting at in his parable new wine must be put into fresh wine skins no one puts new wine into old wine skins otherwise the new wine will burst the skins it will be spilled out the skins will be ruined but new wine must be put into fresh wine skins you might know that in the first century and for many centuries afterwards wine skins were made of animal skins and at first these animal skins did the job they were pliable enough to expand with the fermentation of the wine but soon they became dry and hard and when the new wine was poured into them this internal fermenting of the new wine would give off gases and these gases then would exert pressure on the skins new wine must be put into fresh wine skins so that we do not lose the wine never mind the wine skins you don't want to lose the wine now what is this new wine clearly it is Jesus himself the new wine is a person the new wine that has to be put into ever fresh wine skins is a person who yes is the same yesterday today and forever as the author of the book of Hebrews joyfully celebrates but though he is the same throughout the years he is ever new he is ever creative he is ever expansive the new wine is

Jesus himself and therefore his kingdom and therefore his spirit Jesus kingdom spirit the new wine is Jesus kingdom spirit the new wine is Jesus himself bringing the glorious recreating kingdom of God into the world and breathing and pulling out his spirit into the lives of his disciples the new wine is Jesus as the bridegroom the new wine is the love of the bridegroom for his groom the new wine is the love that flows from him to her which is why this wine is so potent his love is ever new ever fresh ever creative ever lavishing ever extravagant ever expansive new wine must be put into fresh wine skins if the skins are not new they will not yield to the pressure of fermentation if they are old however good they once were the pressure will burst the skins you will lose the skins and the wine oh dear god no don't let us lose the wine

Jesus was telling the scribes and pharisees that the old forms of religion had become too hard too brittle too dry too static to contain the new vital pulsating life he brings and as was the case with first century judaism so it is the case with 21st century christianity some forms of christianity especially in their institutionalized forms are too hard they're too brittle they're too dry they're too static to contain the ever new ever vital ever pulsating life and kingdom and spirit of jesus a number of years ago missiologist howard snyder wrote an insightful book entitled the problem of wineskins he subtitled it church structure in a technological age and commenting on jesus first parable dr snyder writes this he makes this helpful observation listen jesus distinguishes here between something essential and primary the wine and something secondary but necessary the wineskins jesus distinguishes between something essential and primary the wine and something secondary and necessary the wineskins the wine is the gospel jesus kingdom spirit the wineskins says snyder include traditions structures patterns of doing things that have grown up around the gospel the wineskins therefore are the point of contact between the wine and the world and then dr snyder says the wineskins are determined both by the wines properties and the world's pressures that makes sense doesn't it the wineskin determined both by the wines properties inside and the world's pressures outside now since dr snyder wrote that book many church leaders have focused on the implications for wineskins from the world's pressures it's argued that since the world is always changing church wineskins will also always have to be changing traditions structures patterns of doing things that have grown up around the gospel have to adapt to the new context in which we are to live the gospel you would agree with that right

[23 : 59] I didn't hear full endorsement the gospel has to be presented in ways that connect with the prevailing culture without of course endorsing the culture the gospel has to be lived in patterns of doing things that are accessible to the prevailing culture without of course becoming captive to the culture tricky and this is the challenge before us in this city at this time in history I do not need to articulate all the change that has taken place since this church was founded at this corner of the city nor do I need to articulate all the changes that have taken place just since I became pastor in 2009 the changes have been taken place at warp speed and the wineskins pliable in our day very pliable if we're going to partner with

Jesus in his mission in his ever-changing world but there's also the pressure from the wine Dr. Snyder says wineskins are determined both by the world's pressure and by the wine's properties I would say that the wineskins are determined primarily by the wine's properties and the wineskins have to be pliable because of the wine and here's the point of Jesus first parable even if the world never changes even if the world exerts no pressure on the church the wineskins would always have to change I'm going to say that again even if the world around us never changes and even if there is no pressure from the world to change the wineskins nevertheless have to always change that is what Jesus is emphasizing the wineskins have to be pliable because of the potency of the wine our problem is not the world our problem is the wine the wine is simply too potent to stay long and dry uptight hard static wineskins yes churches die they become irrelevant because they do not keep up with the changes in the world but churches mostly die and churches mostly become irrelevant because they do not keep up with the fermenting of the wine the challenge in our time is not due to the pressure of the world the challenge in our time is due to the pressure of the wine the challenge in our time is not to keep pace with the world the challenge in our time is to keep pace with the fermentation of the wine must but of course new wine must be put into new wineskins ever fresh wine must always be put into ever fresh wineskins now wineskins are simply the ways and means of enjoying the wine they are the ways and means of being in relationship with Jesus they are the ways and means of living in his kingdom they are the ways and means of being filled by and walking in his spirit they are the ways and means of experiencing the love of the bridegroom the conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders was due to the fact that the discipline of fasting had become an end in itself but it's not the end it's only a means all religious activity all religious exercises all spiritual disciplines are not the end they are only a means to the end the end is entering into relationship with the living

God and experiencing and enjoying the love of God in Jesus Christ and what Jesus is saying at the beginning of his ministry is that the forms patterns structures of our lives will now be determined by what one thing do they enable us to stay in the love of the bridegroom that is the bottom line do they enable us to stay alive to the unexpected love of Jesus Christ this is true of our personal lives as well as of a community following Jesus with a heart for the city and beyond do the patterns of our lives do the daily patterns of our lives do our lifestyles enable us to stay close to Jesus to live in the kingdom and to walk with the spirit if they do not then they must be changed it's simple as that we have to choose do we want to live in

Christ or not do we want to walk with Jesus Christ 24 7 or not we have to make the choice anything that is in the way must be taken out of the way and we must adapt to the things that will actually help us do that the key issue is can we keep up with Jesus the fermenting of the wine will break through all dry static wineskins do the structures and patterns of being the church enable people to stay close to Jesus to actually live in the kingdom to actually live in the spirit if they do not they have to be changed simple as that simple as that you let it go it may have worked for decades and it may have been good for decades but if it doesn't help people experience Jesus anymore then you let it go which is why Jesus also speaks of old and new garments if you sew a new piece of cloth on an old garment he says you're going to tear the new really the patch and the garment simply aren't going to go together oh that's okay Jesus we can mend we can mend the garment no it won't work oh come on Jesus let us keep this we'll do a real good job of mending he said no this won't work it won't work you see it's all part of growing up the clothes that fit us when we were little children don't fit us when we're teenagers and the clothes we wore when we were teenagers don't fit us when we're young adults and the clothes we wore when we're young adults do not fit us when we are more mature adults and on it goes not because styles change but because we change when Jesus calls us to follow him he's telling us hey you're going to have to put on new clothes clothes that he gives us and he's telling us that what I'm going to do in your life is so potent that you're going to find

yourself changing clothes a lot at the dinner party at

Levi's house Jesus quotes someone who after tasting the new wine says the old is good enough well as a matter of fact the old is good but not as good as the new Jesus is not jettisoning Judaism Jesus is bringing Judaism to its fulfillment he's bringing all religion to its fulfillment in him he is the fulfillment the new is the fulfillment of the old so why settle for the old when the fulfillment of the old has come new wine must be put into new wineskins or you lose the wineskins they burst and you lose the wine no no dear God no I don't want to lose the wine neither do you now I would imagine at this point you're expecting me to name the old wineskins that need to go and the new wineskins we're going to take up and I would love to do so but

[32 : 50] I'm not going to do that right now partly because each of the wineskins that need to be changed require further development than I have time to give this morning time in the word of God daily prayer weekly fellowship with a small group of people weekly worship on the Lord's day more flexible decision making process in the church everyone a minister greater freedom to respond to the Holy Spirit during worship more connection groups on and on the list goes but mostly I will not suggest the changes in the wineskin right now because I do not want to be guilty of doing what the scribes and Pharisees did I do not want to prescribe for any one of you the new ways of thinking feeling being and acting that are necessary I only want you to do what Jesus wants you to do so I'm going to have to trust you to have Jesus tell you where the changes need to come

Presbyterian preacher Lloyd John Ogilvie who retired as the chaplain of the United States Senate a number of years ago begins his commentary on this first of Jesus parables this way there is a great difference between the God of our experience and our experience of God there's a great difference between the God of our experience and our own experience of God because the God we experience is more than our experience of God right so much more infinitely more but sadly many of us settle for our past experience of God that was good enough it was but enough may us celebrate for our present experience of God this is good enough it is good but enough the living God the triune God is so much more than any of us have ever experienced and God wants us to press into that more he wants to expand our experience of him which is what he's doing in our church and it's wonderful to witness many of you are telling me of having encounters with God you never dreamed were possible some of you are telling me of watching God do things you never thought you'd ever see in your lifetime and some of it in the midst of tragedy and pain as some of you know God is taking me to a whole new place with him and it's requiring a whole lot of change I mean major change mostly internal because wineskins are not only external they're internal and the major changes that I have to make are internal and they are not easy to make this has been a hard journey for the last couple years making these internal changes but if I want to go where God is leading me

I must make those changes first miracle at a wedding party Jesus takes 120 gallons of stagnant water and turns them into vintage wine first parable at a party thrown by a man overwhelmed by Jesus unexpected unconditional embrace Jesus tells us that none of the water pots in the room are big enough to contain the wine he's going to give his people ever fresh wine must be put into ever fresh wineskins so bottom line do whatever it takes to enjoy the wine the rules are all suspended just do what you need to do to enjoy the wine do whatever it takes to stay in love with the bridegroom do whatever it takes to actually enter in and live the kingdom do whatever it takes to let his spirit expand our capacity to receive his fullness make whatever changes you need to make so that you do not miss out on the fermenting of new wine let us pray

I trust that as I've been talking you've been hearing the Lord Jesus talk to you and addressing you very specifically and personally so I invite you now before we get busy with the rest of the day we still have this time I invite you to say back to Jesus in the quiet say back to him what he said to you dear Lord

[38 : 22] I think I can speak on behalf of all or definitely the majority of people gathered in this room right now and say oh boy we do not want to miss out on the new wine and so we trust you to give us grace to make the adjustments so that we can be alive like you want your people to be alive them what I