

Old And New

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[0 : 00] New and old, or old and new. Have you ever noticed how that which is new soon becomes old?

Some years ago, Facebook was new. Now, with the exception of Messenger, Facebook is tired and kind of old. Have you ever noticed how old soon becomes new?

Until recently, 80s music stayed in the 1980s, but now everyone listens to 80s music. Well, what about Jesus and his gospel?

We might argue that because Christianity has never been in fashion, it will never be out of fashion. But by the same token, is Jesus and his gospel old, or is it new?

Some people talk about Scotland being a post-Christian society. Because the vast majority of Scottish people have never heard a clear presentation of the good news of Jesus Christ.

[1 : 06] It's time for what was once thought of as old to become new again. For this generation of Scottish people to hear that faith in Jesus Christ never goes out of fashion.

That's true in the first century, or in the 21st century. Imagine the impact that Jesus had upon the people of his day. For many of the religious teachers, the newness of Jesus' message was a threat to the old ways of doing things handed down through generations of the rabbis.

They didn't like the way in which Jesus seemed to break the rules. He touched unclean lepers. He claimed to forgive sins. He associated with unclean people.

They didn't like all the new things Jesus was doing and saying. But it wasn't only Jesus they didn't like. They didn't like his followers either.

Really religious people do really religious things. Like regularly fast. And pray at set times.

[2 : 24] But the disciples who were with Jesus, they did neither. Rather, they ate and they drank and they laughed as though they were celebrating. Even John the Baptist's disciples followed the old ways.

So in this passage, the scene is set for conflict between old and new. In Luke 5.33-39, we have its first sparks.

This passage has an awful lot to teach us about the world in which Jesus lived. But also about our world. Because although 2,000 years have passed since these events took place.

The human heart hasn't changed at all. So today we want to look at the new and the old. The new represented by Jesus and his gospel.

The old represented by the Pharisees and their religion. And we must ask ourselves the question. Which of these is more attractive to us?

[3 : 29] Which of these offers the most hope for us? Heavenly Father, we bow in your presence.

May your word be our rule. Your spirit, our teacher. And your greater glory, our supreme concern. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

First of all then, new. New. This passage is set up in rather standard style. A discussion between Jesus and the Pharisees is followed by two short parables where Jesus explains the newness of the gospel he's preaching.

The word new is used seven times in this passage. Who Jesus is and what Jesus says is new compared to the old methods and the old message of the Pharisees, the rabbis, and their followers. The discussion begins when Jesus becomes aware of their criticism of his disciples. They don't fast. They don't pray. They don't do really religious things like those of John the Baptist and those of the Pharisees.

[4 : 45] This is a reference to the regular fasting and set-time prayers observed by those who strictly held to the teaching and the regulations of the Jewish rabbis.

By contrast, the disciples of Jesus are eating and drinking. They're enjoying feasts in the house of a tax collector called Levi. They're not acting in a religious way.

Jesus, aware of their criticism, proceeds then to explain why his disciples are acting in this way.

And then goes on to defend the newness of his message and the ministry he's introducing.

He talks of two things. First of all, a new relationship. And second, a new faith. A new relationship. A new faith.

A new relationship. Jesus begins by asking, Can you make the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them?

[5 : 52] When a couple gets married, the overriding note of the day is celebration. Not sorrow. The marriage ceremony is followed by a wedding meal where there's joy.

Laughter. The overriding theme in fasting is repentance. Sorrow. Self-denial. So, of course, the straight answer to Jesus' question is no.

The guests at a wedding do not fast while the bridegroom is with them. They don't fast. They celebrate. And that precisely is what Jesus' disciples are doing.

They are not fasting. They are feasting. They are not sorrowing. They are celebrating. But surely this means that if the wedding guests represent the disciples in this passage, the bridegroom represents Jesus.

He is with them. That's why they're celebrating. But at this stage, the Pharisees were still with the disciples and John the Baptist was with his also.

[7 : 09] So, the question comes up, in what way is Jesus different from the others? What does Jesus mean when he calls himself the bridegroom?

And what does this mean for his relationship with them? Well, the image of a bride and bridegroom is well known to us as humans. But it's also a very common theme in the Old Testament to describe God's relationship to his people.

For example, who could forget the image of a bride and bridegroom in the book of the Song of Solomon? There, the metaphorical picture between God and his people is described in terms of a marriage, with every feature of its love and intimacy explored and celebrated.

But the image of a bride and bridegroom most prominently features in the writings of the prophets. For example, in Jeremiah 2, verse 12, we read these words.

Thus says the Lord, Jeremiah is picturing Israel as the faithful bride, God as the faithful bridegroom.

[8 : 31] And then in the prophet Hosea, we have another metaphorical picture of God as the bridegroom and Israel as the bride. But this time, not a faithful bride, but an adulteress who delights in other loves.

And yet, despite Israel's unfaithfulness, God takes her back and keeps loving her. Jesus, you see, is using this bridegroom image to say something about himself.

He is setting himself apart from John the Baptist and the Pharisees by using the Old Testament imagery of the bridegroom. He's saying something utterly radical, something which must have jarred in the ears of his listeners.

He is saying that what was true of the God of the Old Testament is also true of him. God was bridegroom to Old Testament Israel.

Jesus is that bridegroom. It's an astonishing claim for the Jesus who just a few days before did what only God could do, namely forgive sin.

[9 : 46] He is claiming to be God himself. You can almost imagine the stunned silence that followed. The Pharisees would have looked at each other and would have said, did he really just say that?

Did you hear what he said? Who does he think he is? From this passage, there is no doubt who Jesus thought he was.

The bridegroom come to claim his bride Israel from her unfaithfulness. Jesus is claiming something extraordinary.

Anyone else who should claim such a thing is either mad or bad. And you can clearly see that Jesus was neither. The same God who spoke in the Old Testament to his people with such love and authority and intimacy in the Song of Solomon now stands before them receiving their criticism. The same God who spoke in the Old Testament through the prophets drawing them away from their unfaithfulness and back to himself now stands before them his appeal the same as always.

[11:10] You are my beloved people and I love you. Now come back to me. This changes everything about our relationship with Jesus, does it not?

The Pharisees and their disciples adhered strictly to the teaching of the rabbis. These rabbis had taken the writings of the Old Testament and interpreted them to say exactly the opposite of what they meant.

They had twisted the portrayal of God into a stern judge as opposed to the loving, saving God he had revealed himself to be.

They taught a loveless religion. Not the faith of the bridegroom. This loving relationship between God and his people.

So you see, this new relationship which Jesus introduces in Luke chapter 5 is not so new after all. It is what our relationship to God was always meant to be as human beings.

[12:25] Love from God. Love to God. Obedience to God is not the path to earning God's love but the path which flows from God's love.

It's love, not legalism which provides the structure for our new relationship with Jesus Christ. Strip back all the layers of our Christian practices and our daily obedience to God and what do you find? Is it all an effort to earn God's love and favor? Or is it a response to God's love and salvation? Is Christ your bridegroom today?

The Savior you love and to whom you are committed? Jesus' teaching here challenges us concerning our relationship to him.

Where do we stand with Jesus? The old or the new? New relationship. But secondly, there's this new faith.

[13:32] There's this new faith Jesus speaks about. You see, the initial complaint wasn't so much against Jesus but against his disciples. The disciples of the Pharisees and John the Baptist had regular fasting and prayer time set aside according to the teaching of the rabbis but not those of Jesus.

They were eating and drinking with disreputable people like Levi and the other tax collectors. They weren't acting like religiously zealous disciples at all. Their lifestyle was so very different, you see. As we'll see in a moment, Jesus uses this opportunity to foretell his suffering and departure and the impact it will have upon their discipleship. Likewise, he describes their form of discipleship as temporary in this passage.

But it also provides Jesus with an opportunity to tell two parables. one about a new patch being sewn onto an old garment, the other new wine being put into old wineskins.

In the first case, the new patch because of the difference in texture, color, flexibility will take away from the old garment. In the second case, the new wine because it's continuing to ferment and therefore to expand will burst the old wineskin.

[14:59] What Jesus is referring to here is the basic incompatibility of faith in him with the religious practices of Judaism.

The basic incompatibility of faith in him with the religious practices of Judaism. they are not two expressions of one faith.

They are two completely different faiths. The religion of the rabbis is trying to use religious ceremonies and moral legalism as the means of salvation.

The religious system comes first. the faith of Jesus is building a salvation already assured and expressing that salvation through a joyful and grace-filled lifestyle.

The relationship with God comes first. in some ways they may look the same but they're not the same at all.

[16:17] They're altogether different. In one humanity is trying to save itself. In the other God has come down to humanity to save it. In one humanity loves God.

In the other God loves humanity. In one humanity reaches up to God. In the other God reaches down to humanity. humanity. They are not the same at all.

A couple of years ago I attended a service at a well-known cathedral in England. The preacher was talking about worship or praise. They said worship is how we reach up to God.

Worship is how we reach up to God. Which of these two religions was that preacher espousing. The religion of the Pharisees or the faith of Jesus was the first.

The religion of the Pharisees. The second the faith of Jesus tells us that our worship is a response to God's love.

[17 : 32] It is not how we reach up to God or earn God's love. For all that we were in a Christian cathedral one of the greatest in the world the words used were Christian words in a Christian service in a Christian place.

The message was not Christian at all. It was man-made legalism the old garment the old wineskin. later on after the bridegroom has left his disciples will fast and pray but it will not be because they're trying to earn their salvation.

They will not be attempting to reach up to God. Rather they'll be fasting and praying as a response to God's sovereign mercy and the cross and resurrection of his son.

saving them from their sin and from the fear of death. They'll be responding to how God in Christ has reached down to them.

And their fasting and their praying may look the same as others but they won't sound the same because in true Christianity the word which is preached will be about what God has done for us.

[18 : 58] Not what we can do for God. They are totally different religions. And not only are they totally different they are totally incompatible.

They are like oil and water. They don't mix. They can't mix. Our faith is all of grace or it is none of grace.

It is all of mercy or it's all of merit. God and humanity do not meet somewhere in the middle.

Christian religious syncretism with any other religion is impossible.

read the great book written by J. Gresham Machen called Christianity and Liberalism. These two systems are fundamentally incompatible.

But the thing is you know the faith of Jesus isn't that new. Abraham had it. David had it. The great fathers of the Jewish nation had it.

[20 : 19] But the rabbis had lost it and turned it into a man-made religion composed of thousands of laws and regulations. Christians. Now the early church was made up of Jewish and Gentile Christians.

Some of those Jewish Christians especially those who had previously been Pharisees introduced into the church a halfway house between Judaism and Christianity.

They're called Judaizers. They believe that we are saved by faith in Jesus Christ and observance of the distinctive distinctives of the Jewish religion.

For example, food laws, ceremonial washing, circumcision. Their false teaching was creating havoc in the early church by turning Gentile Christians who believed in salvation by grace alone in Christ alone through faith alone into second-class citizens in the church.

One of the reasons Luke includes this story of the newness of the faith of Jesus in this gospel is to reinforce to the early church the distinctiveness of Christianity.

[21 : 33] You cannot mix it with Judaism. Salvation is all of grace or it is none of grace. Salvation is all of mercy or it's all of merit.

The Judaizers of the early church, for all they looked apart, they were entirely wrong. they were trying to sew a new patch onto an old garment and pour new wine into old wineskins.

Our salvation as Christians is all by faith in Christ, 100%. Now we may have been brought up in a church environment where the impression was given, albeit unconsciously, that to be a Christian you had to believe in Jesus and do certain things.

Belief in Jesus was not enough. You also had to observe the contextual, cultural features of Christianity. What you wear, how you speak.

But you see, that's wrong. It is a new patch on an old garment. to become a Christian, all you need to do is to believe in Jesus Christ.

[22 : 59] All you need is faith in Jesus Christ, the bridegroom who loves you, who gave himself for you on the cross to take away all your sins. Do you hear that?

Not about what you wear, not about what you look, not about your past. All you have to do is to believe.

No more is required. No less is necessary. Perhaps this is new for you. Sounds revolutionary, doesn't it? The truth is that it's the old, old story of the gospel handed down for the apostles and powerfully active all over our world today.

It's new and it's old. And for that reason the gospel of Jesus Christ never gets old, never goes out of fashion. And it's for all of us here today in this place, just as it was for the early church, just as it was for the first disciples.

New. Well then second and very briefly, old. Old. There are some parts of the story which are depressingly old and sound depressingly familiar.

[24 : 17] Jesus didn't live in ideal circumstances, he faced opposition. It usually started out as this did, muttering, whinging, complaining.

It ended with him being nailed to a cross and executed as a criminal. What is new in this passage is the message of Jesus. What is old in this passage is the response of man to that message.

On two occasions in this passage, Jesus sounds ominous notes for the future. First he talks of the bridegroom going away. It is then the disciples will mourn and fast.

The day will come when they no longer have Jesus physically with them. It is perhaps the first indication of Jesus' violent departure from them. He'll be taken from them.

It's a first pointer to his death on the cross. But the second ominous note is in the last verse, verse 39, where he says, no one drinking old wine desires new, for he says, the old is good.

[25 : 24] Jesus is telling us here that when presented with the new way of faith in him, those who are used to the old ways of rabbinic teaching will reject him.

They'll stick to what they're comfortable with and what they know, rather than have faith and trust in Jesus Christ. They'll keep trying to reach up to God with their ceremonies and their religion, rather than believing that in Jesus Christ, God has reached down to them.

They'll reject Jesus. You put these two ominous notes together, and you're left with the conclusion. the incompatibility of the two forms of faith and the rejection of Jesus and his message by the religious leadership of the Jewish nation will lead to him being forcefully taken away from his disciples and put to death.

Even at this early stage in Jesus' ministry, he knew the cost of the message he preached. he was living under the shadow of the cross, always, and now what was once a shadow was becoming real.

What is old about this passage is that that message of faith in God has always been met by human opposition. Cain killed his brother Abel over the issue of faith.

[26 : 56] Countless prophets in the Old Testament were killed on account of their message of faith. The blood of the martyrs stained the early church and ever since right up until this day those who proclaim salvation by faith alone in Christ alone over against religions which try to reach up to God are persecuted and murdered.

Many parts of the world today Christians carry their own crosses on their backs awaiting the moment they'll be nailed to them and put to death for their faith in Jesus.

Perhaps you're a student in school or university and you're made to feel rather stupid and naive for believing the things you do. You feel rather alone. here's the truth.

You are alone. But you aren't alone. For since the beginning of the human race those who believe and trust in God through faith have always been made to feel on the outside.

Stay faithful to Christ in these times because he knows where you are and he sympathizes with how you feel. he has been where you are today and he knows.

[28 : 16] So is Jesus and his gospel old or new? Luke wants to argue that it's as old as the hills and as new as today's newspaper. You can trust it not to change and never to go out of fashion.

That's why people of every generation and every culture are finding new life and hope in Jesus and his gospel even today.

You can find it too. Not by trying to reach up to God. By becoming more religious and doing more religious things. But by entering into the most amazing relationship with Jesus Christ.

All you must do is to believe that what he did by dying on the cross to take away sins. he did for you.

That's all. So come. The marriage feast is set up. And all you must do is come.

[29 : 22] see.

Come.