

A Feast with New Wine

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[0 : 00] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 15th of June 2003. The preacher is Ali Saunders.

Her sermon is entitled A Feast with New Wine and is based on Luke chapter 5 verses 27 to 39.

Well, the one conversation topic that I've been hearing more than anything else in the last few weeks has been this. Have you seen The Matrix Reloaded yet?

Which do you think is better, one or two? There's been a big debate going on everywhere. And from what I've heard, most people seem to think that the first one, the original Matrix, is the best. But you are welcome to disagree.

There seems to be stacks of sequels in the cinemas at the moment. I'm not sure if you've noticed. First there was Lord of the Rings, The Fellowship of the Ring. And then there was The Two Towers. At the moment X-Men 2 is out.

[1 : 02] And soon the next Charlie's Angels movie is going to be on. And people will be talking about which one was better. There's those who prefer the original Coke to the vanilla Coke. And those who love the latest album from Kylie but don't like her old stuff.

For some, the slogan is, new is better. And for others, the slogan is, you can't beat an original. Which group are you in? Do you follow the latest trends?

Or do you stick to what's tried and true? It seems strange for us to think about Christianity as a new religion. But that's exactly what it was when Jesus started his ministry in the book of Luke that we've been reading.

People weren't sure what to make of him. Was he preaching some new fad that would come and go and never be heard of again? Or was he part of a long line of Jewish tradition?

No different from the rest of the rabbis and teachers that set themselves up to speak about God. Was his message a new one or an old one? These stories in Luke 5 challenge us to view Jesus as God's King of the new kingdom.

[2 : 14] And to understand what a person in Jesus' kingdom looks like. For the Christian, it's out with the old way and in with the new way. It's a call to get Jesus right.

So tonight we pick up the story again in verse 27 with the story of Levi. After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector named Levi sitting in the tax booth.

He said to him, follow me. He got up, left everything and followed him. Now as you can see, this is just a short story. It's only two verses. But it illustrates the rest of what Jesus teaches in the rest of the passage.

Levi is sitting in his tax booth, probably on the side of a major travelling route. And he collects levy from people who pass from city to city. Jesus initiates contact with Levi and says to him, follow me. He gets up, leaves everything and follows Jesus. Now tax collectors like Levi weren't particularly popular people. They worked for the Roman government and they supported the very social order that shackled and degraded the Jewish people.

[3 : 24] As for the religious Jews, they disapproved of the tax collectors because they thought that they were morally unclean. People like Levi were traitors and irreligious.

They were used by the Romans, despised by the common class and looked down on by religious Jews. Yet Jesus asked Levi to come and follow him. Unlike Simon Peter, who we saw a couple of weeks ago with Danny speaking, Levi was a tax collector and a considerably wealthy man.

So he couldn't just drop everything and come back to it when his fascination with Jesus was over or when it suited him. Simon might be able to pick up his fishing business once again.

But for Levi, when he walked away from his tax booth, he left all his wealth, all his position and all his security behind. For Levi, Jesus' call took precedence over his old vocation.

The trade was weighty but worth it. When Jesus asked Levi to follow him, he asked him to a new way of life.

[4 : 33] So what's Levi's response to following Jesus? Well, we see that in the next story in verse 29. Please pick it up with me. Then Levi gave a great banquet for Jesus in his house.

And there was a large crowd of tax collectors and others sitting at the table with them. The Pharisees and their scribes were complaining to the disciples, saying, Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?

Jesus answered, Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have come to call not the righteous, but sinners to repentance. Levi's response is to throw a party.

He gives a big party and invites as many people as he can to meet Jesus and to find out what's happened. He wants to share the good news. And just as we might throw a big engagement party, if we're getting married to tell all our friends, or we might have a party after winning a sports match, so Levi thinks he's got something worth celebrating.

And as you know, when you have a party, there's always a party pooper. And in verse 30, we see that it's the Pharisees and their scribes. Now they're obviously not at the party because they were never associated with such people.

[5 : 47] But they hear about the party and they aren't impressed. They complain to Jesus' disciples and they ask, Why do they eat with tax collectors and sinners? The reason for this question is because sharing a meal with someone in that culture meant that you approved of them and that they were friends of yours, similar to the way that we have dinner with friends today.

This table fellowship was looked down by the Pharisees, who would not eat with the unclean. And in fact, the name Pharisee commonly meant separatist or separated one.

And they strongly disapproved of Jesus' inclusive, indiscriminate table fellowship with known sinners. So Jesus answers the complaint in verse 32.

Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. You see, you don't expect a doctor to only hang around with well people and never associate with the sick.

Their job is to be with sick people and to make them better. Their mission is to sick people, to make them well. The Pharisees got Jesus' job wrong.

[6 : 57] They thought that for Jesus to make the claim to be sent from God meant that he should only hang around with religious people and that he should keep himself separate and pure, like they did.

They got Jesus wrong. To get Jesus right, we need to get his mission right. Now, today there's plenty of people that have a thing for Jesus.

Many people think that he came to heal and that we can admire him as a defender of the powerless. Or you can think that he's a profound teacher and think abstractly about his teaching about love and learn from his wisdom.

Others might see him as a revolutionary who came to stand up to the authorities and the institutions of the day. Now, these things may be somewhat true but to only see Jesus the way that we want to see Jesus is a big mistake.

He's his own man after all. He's made very clear statements about who he is and what his mission is and we need to be true to this. So have a look at verse 32 with me.

[8 : 01] I've come not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. This is Jesus' mission. He came to call sinners to repentance. And Levi's a perfect example of that.

Levi knew that he was a sinner and when Jesus said, follow me, he did. I want to take a closer look at Jesus' mission statement because I think it's really important.

He starts off by saying, I have come. Now, I know lots of people that can't even work out what to wear in the morning or what corset you need to do or who or if to marry, let alone what job to do.

Jesus seems pretty clear about his purpose. Strangely so, in fact. I've never heard someone say, I have come to be an accountant or I have come to get married, to settle down and have some kids.

We don't speak like that. I think that this indicates that Jesus didn't see himself as an ordinary person, but someone with a particular purpose and a particular mission.

[9 : 12] Perhaps it's even an indication that he's more than just a person, that he is, in fact, from God and of God. Next, Jesus came to call people.

But note that he's very specific about who he came to call. He's come to call not the righteous, but sinners. That means, I think, that he's come to call people who get that they're unworthy before

God.

They're people that see that they can't be right with God on their own. It's not that Jesus actually thinks that there's some people out there who are righteous and that he doesn't need to bother about them because they'll be fine on their own.

No, when Jesus says, not the righteous, it means those that think they're righteous, like the Pharisees, those who think that they can please God by the things they do or the company they keep.

Those people don't see their sickness and therefore they aren't in want of being healed. The righteous can't repent because they don't see their need. Only sinners can. I recently read a story much like this.

[10:22] There was a 17-year-old guy who was discovered in his home unconscious after being a passenger in a car crash. After the accident, he was checked out and besides some minor injuries, he was fine and they sent him home.

But four days after, he was found with no pulse and was rushed to the hospital and he died 30 minutes after his arrival. At first, the doctors thought that it was just from internal injuries that they didn't pick up earlier from the accident.

But an autopsy revealed that he'd died from testicular cancer, which had spread throughout his body. And this cancer is apparently quite noticeable and it's also one of the most curable.

The boy never went to the doctors and therefore he was never able to be cured. Apparently, guys aren't very good at going to the doctors. There was a survey that found that fewer than one in five said that they'd seek immediate medical care if they were sick or in pain.

Nearly 40% said that they'd wait a few days and 41% said that they'd delay seeing a doctor for at least a week or as long as possible if they were sick. Just like the Pharisees and like very many of us today, Jesus says that we need to admit that we're sick.

[11:41] We need to admit that we're sinners so that we can be made right by Jesus. He came to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance. If we never admit our inability and unworthiness before God, we will never experience his forgiveness and his grace.

The final thing that I want to say about Jesus' mission statement is the result of his call. Jesus makes himself clear that he doesn't just come to call sinners but to call them to repentance.

That is that there has to be repentance to be part of God's kingdom. You're not okay just how you are. There's a lot of misunderstanding about the word repentance so let me try and explain what it means.

The actual two parts of the word in Greek mean change and mind. So basically it means to change your mind about something in the sense that you might be driving to work one day and realise that you've forgotten something important so you turn around and drive back the other way.

You change your mind about your direction. So being a Christian, being someone that follows Jesus, first and foremost means to change your mind.

[12:56] It means to change your mind about who Jesus is and who you are and how you can be right with God. It's a reorientation of the way you see things.

Most of us think that basically we're okay. Sure we might have our off moments but on the whole we're pretty good and if there's a God he must think that we're okay too.

But Jesus says that he came to call sinners and to sin means to fall short of God's glory, to not meet the standard. Sure if we compare ourselves we don't come out too badly with each other.

But God doesn't compare us like that. He compares us to himself and he alone is perfect. Suppose we decide to go to the movies and when we arrive we notice that the ticket prices have jumped up to \$20 each.

You check your wallet and you see that you've only got \$17. I check mine and I've only got \$1.50. I guess I was expecting you to shout me. You fall short by \$3 and I'm not even close.

[14:05] But neither of us will be seeing a movie that night. We both fall short. I think that's what it means to fall short of God's glory. There's no scraping through.

It's either pass or fail. It's only by Jesus paying the full price for us which is his death and condemnation on the cross that we can meet God's standard and be made right with him.

The only people that will be in God's new kingdom are sinners who have repented and have followed Jesus' call. Jesus' mission was to call sinners to repentance.

Levi sees himself as someone who's in need of God's forgiveness. He answers Jesus' call and follows him. Levi is what a person of the new kingdom looks like.

But the Pharisees just don't get this. They think they're fine on their own. They don't see that they fall short. They don't get Jesus right. This is made obvious by their next complaint which we see in verse 33.

[15:15] Please turn to look at that with me. Then they said to him, John's disciples, like the disciples of the Pharisees, frequently fast and pray. Be your disciples, eat and drink.

Jesus said to them, you cannot make wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them, can you? The days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them and then they will fast in those days.

Jesus' disciples eat and drink because of the joy that comes from knowing Jesus. And this seems to fly in the face of the rich heritage of fasting in Judaism and in particular for the Pharisees who fasted twice a week, every Monday and Thursday.

It's not that Jesus and his disciples never fasted and prayed. On the contrary, they did fast and Jesus is seen regularly praying. It's more that fasting was seen as a pious act of those who waited for the coming kingdom and the fulfillment of God's promises.

So how could Jesus be a man of God and rarely engage in such practices? That's the question that's on their mind. What made Jesus' disciples different?

[16:28] Why didn't they fast and pray like others did? Well, the answer is that the King is present. The presence of Jesus is what makes all the difference.

Check out his answer, verse 34. You cannot make wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them, can you? The bridegroom is there, Jesus. Jesus' arrival is reason enough to celebrate.

They didn't have to wait any longer. Fasting is an act of preparation for the King. But the old way is finished with now, that the King is present and the new way has come.

It's not appropriate to fast when the King is present among you. Now, for those who are studying for exams at the moment, you know that the time for studying and preparation is now.

In a week or so will come the exams, and so for the moment, you delay parties and you delay friends just for a while while you hit the books. But after the exams are over and you've given it your best, you know that it's no longer appropriate to hang around at home in your tracky decks reading about discrete maths and biology.

[17:37] It's right and appropriate for you to have a break because what you're preparing for is finished. Jesus is saying that the Kingdom of God has come with Jesus being present.

And so the time of preparation, the old way is over. The time for celebration for those of the Kingdom has come. Jesus relates being a disciple of his to a wedding party.

There's no mourning or sorrow. The repentance that he speaks of brings great things, things worth celebrating, not regretting. And marriage is a fulfilment of promises that's made to each other.

And in the same way, Jesus on earth is a fulfilment of the promises of God's Messiah and King. Yet Jesus says that there will be a time to come when the bridegroom will be taken away and for those days his disciples will fast to mourn.

Jesus here alludes to the time when he is going to be killed until he rose again. But now with Jesus' resurrection, there's nothing left to be sad about. There is only joy.

[18:46] You see, the Pharisees and John's disciples have missed the boat. They've been waiting for something which has already arrived.

God's Kingdom has come. Jesus, the King, is there and he ushers in his new Kingdom. All the prophecies and all the promises of the Old Testament, they've all reached their fulfilment in Jesus, in the personal work of Jesus Christ.

Jesus makes it clear that the time to celebrate is now because the King is calling people into his Kingdom. The old way has gone. The new way has come.

This is what God has been promising all along. Here with Jesus, we see not just an update on an old system, but a complete transformation. Jesus brings us a new approach to God.

The ways of Jesus and the traditions of Pharisaic Judaism can't be mixed without damaging the gospel of Jesus. Jesus brings a new approach to God which fulfills God's promises and totally transcends all their expectations.

[20:00] And so we see this finally when Jesus explains this with two illustrations. The first is about garments and the second is about wineskins. You can see this from verse 36.

Hereso told them a parable. No one tears a piece from a new garment and sews it on an old garment. Otherwise the new will be torn 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 will be spilled and the skins will be destroyed. But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins. And no one after drinking old wine desires new wine but says the old is good. The word new is mentioned here seven times. You don't destroy a good new piece of material by cutting out to fix an old outfit because they don't match and you will have destroyed both the old and the new. Likewise you don't take some new wine and put into a dried up old wineskin because as the new wine ferments it expands and it bursts the brutal skins and everything becomes ruined. [21 : 15] These are stupid things to do. No one does them. And this is what the Pharisees were trying to do with Jesus. They were trying to box him into their old framework to fit their thinking about who he is and what he came for.

This approach Jesus says doesn't work. They are incompatible. He can't place the new wine of the gospel into old wineskins of Judaism because the result is neither the gospel or Judaism. Jesus can't be made to fit into an old system. His gospel supersedes all other systems and makes all other ways to God obsolete. Jesus brings the realisation of God's kingdom via his coming and dying on the cross and rising to new life. Jesus says they can't cut him out and stick him onto another belief or faith. To do that would destroy both. Know what you do when something's old and it no longer serves its purpose. You throw it out. Jesus is the king of the new covenant and the new kingdom and we are to follow him. To be like Levi and to leave everything that's old behind and follow Jesus. [22 : 32] His kingdom will never be outdated and made redundant. There is no new kingdom to come. Jesus is the one that the whole of history has been looking forward to.

He brings in the new age of God's promises. All the expectations and all the promises that God made to the Israelites in the Old Testament were a shadow of the reality to come. Jesus is the full and final revelation of God. He's superior to every other belief or every other being. He is the only and unique way to God. Jesus can never be a patch on your old life or fill an old vessel. Jesus transforms the whole of our lives. He regenerates us so that we can be a new person.

And yet, as Jesus speaks, he knows that there will be some in the old order who will not respond to the call of the king. There's many people who like to hang on to the old way. [23 : 40] And Danny, my husband, is a good example of this. He had a favourite pair of socks. Which he liked to wear on the weekend. After wearing boring black work socks every day of the week, he liked the novelty of having a special pair which he kept for the weekend.

But after seven years, these socks weren't as good as they used to be. I'd sewn up the holes a few times, but by now, the holes were about as big as my hand and his whole foot was exposed. And yet, he kept on wearing them. He still didn't want to let them go. I tried reasoning, but that wouldn't work. I tried showing more than millions of socks that were in the drawer, but he wasn't interested.

And so, to his horror, I threw them out. Some people just don't want to move on. Even when what they're hanging on to is redundant and a better option is staring them in the face. And that's why Jesus says at the end of the story, And no one, after drinking old wine, desires new wine, but says the old is good. Like the Pharisees, many think that the old is good and refuse to move on to a new and better way.

[24 : 57] They hear Jesus' words as new wine in a bad, inferior sense, because new wine doesn't taste as good as mature old wine. And they refuse to accept Jesus' call.

This passage calls us to get real with Jesus. To not flirt around with him and identify ourselves with him when it suits us, but to repent, to change our minds and follow him. We need to have him as our first love, our top priority, and the authority over every area of our lives. This is what I call a gospel plus or minus issue.

By adding to or subtracting from the gospel of Jesus leaves us with no gospel at all. That is that we can have a gospel plus model where we say, yes, I'm a sinner in need of forgiveness, but God will forgive me if I go to church, if I be a good person, if I'm always nice to people, et cetera, et cetera. We might start off with the gospel, but then we add so many other things to it that it's no gospel at all, and that it's not Jesus that saves us, but it's ourselves by all the good things that we do.

[26 : 16] This is not the gospel of Jesus. Or, there's the gospel minus model. This is where we say, sure, I'm a Christian. I believe the Bible, but I don't believe that God really judges people because he's a loving God and he wouldn't send people to hell and I don't think that being a Christian means enough to change my life, et cetera, et cetera.

Here we start with the gospel, but again, we cut away all the bits that don't suit us, the parts we don't like or the parts that we find hard to deal with, like sin and judgment. And again, if we do this, we end up with not the gospel of Jesus, but our own version that we made up.

These ways of approaching Christianity, Jesus warned of in this passage. Today, it's called syncretism, where there's no exclusive source of truth and like a smorgasbord, you take a little bit of this and a little bit of that and you make your own choose your own religion.

But Jesus calls us to follow him alone. No adding, no subtracting or amalgamating him with anyone else. If we make any changes to his gospel, we will not be saved.

The king has come. His kingdom has been inaugurated and we look forward to its consummation when he returns.

[27 : 44] The king is calling for people to join him in his kingdom. Have you answered the call of the king? Are you following him? If you have answered his call, this is what a person of Jesus' new kingdom looks like.

They are sinners, knowing that they fall short of God's glory. They have repented. They have changed their minds and their direction. They instead follow Jesus.

They serve the king and follow him only. They fellowship with other sinners. They no longer condemn others, but celebrate with them as fellow repented sinners.

And they celebrate the new kingdom. They have rejected the old way and have latched on to the new life that Jesus offers. each person in Jesus' kingdom is like this.

There is none that are there that are righteous of themselves. All alike are dependent on God's grace and mercy. Have you answered the call from the king?

[28 : 52] He is calling sinners to repentance. of his miraculous ministry to his high school during supper and therefore there is nochanism.

And of course ticket■ can bench Islam and he misses the kind of room with the be triggered for that he will also be the host and re deriv ■ him not than the being left he long to he