



The unfolding of your words gives light.

To Seek and to Save

An Exposition of the Gospel of Luke

³³And 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^a." ³⁴And Jesus said to them, "You cannot make the attendants of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them, can you^b?" ³⁵But *the days* will come; and when the bridegroom is taken away from them, then they will fast in those days^c." ³⁶And He was also telling them a parable^d: "No one tears a piece of cloth from a new

^a 5:33 **The disciples of John often fast and offer prayers, the *disciples* of the Pharisees also do the same, but Yours eat and drink.** Remember the party Jesus attended at Levi's house. This continued the conversation at Capernaum between the religious leaders and Jesus. Matthew's gospel says it was in fact some of John's disciples asking this question. There is no contradiction in facts. Mark clears this up, pointing out (Mark 2:18) that it was in fact both groups who asked the question.

A running criticism about Jesus relates to His perceived lack of austere living. For instance Luke also records (Luke 7:33-34) a similar circumstance where Jesus was both called a glutton and a drunkard. Two other accounts (Matthew 26:6-13; John 12:1-8) show Jesus being criticized for allowing Himself to be anointed with costly perfume. His defense against the accusation of waste was the same as His point in this parable. Extravagance is in order when the King is in the room. Jesus said: "...you always have the poor with you, but you do not always have Me."

^b 5:34 **You cannot make the attendants of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them, can you?** Remember that John the Baptist himself used this metaphor when he said:

He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice So this joy of mine has been made full. John 3:29

Through all of history the covenant people of God are pictured as His bride (Isaiah 54:4-5; Hosea 2:14-20; Ephesians 5:22-33; Revelation 21:9-12). The picture here is the joy of the bridegroom and His friends. Self-denial is part of following the living God but, depending on the circumstance, so is feasting. Using the wisdom of Solomon in Ecclesiastes 3:4, this was not a time for weeping and mourning but a time for laughing and dancing.

^c 5:35 **when the bridegroom is taken away from them, then they will fast in those days.** Weddings are among the most joyful occasions we can experience. Scripture bears this out (often with reference to the good times taken away by judgment):

Then I will make to cease from the cities of Judah and from the streets of Jerusalem the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride; for the land will become a ruin. Jeremiah 7:34

Jesus wanted the inquisitors to know that His disciples would soon have their turn to mourn and fast.

^d 5:36 **He was also telling them a parable.** This is the first parable recorded by Luke. A parable is simply a verbal object lesson. The Creator of matter knew how to use His creation to teach immaterial lessons. Other examples of parables you find in Luke are:

- The parable of the two debtors (Luke 7:36-50)
- The parable of the sower (Luke 8:4-15)
- The parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)
- The parable of the persistent friend (Luke 11:1-13)
- The parable of the rich fool (Luke 12:13-21)
- The parable of the wedding feast (Luke 12:35-48)
- The parable of the barren fig tree (Luke 13:1-9)

The Gospel of Luke
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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^a. ³⁷And 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^b. ³⁸But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins. ³⁹And no one, after drinking old *wine* wishes for new; for he says, 'The old is good *enough*'^c ^d

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- The parables of the little things (Luke 13:18-21)
 - The parable of the great banquet (Luke 14:1-24)
 - The parables of the lost things (Luke 15:1-32)
 - The parable of the shrewd manager (Luke 16:1-13)
 - The parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:14-31)

^a 5:36 **No one tears a piece of cloth from 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.** It is easier to understand a statement of Jesus if He is referring to a text or story from the Hebrew Scriptures. That is not the case here. It is also easier to interpret a text based on the immediate context, but Jesus had not been speaking directly of anything "new" or "old."

So we have to look at the setting and assume the parable relates to the question at hand: *Was Jesus promoting waste and gluttony?*

Two points might help us see why Jesus used these two illustrations. We can connect weddings and parties with clothing and wine. Jesus' first miracle was the making of wine with apparent age at a wedding (John 2). Later parables connected proper clothing and a wedding (Matthew 22:1-14; Luke 12:35).

^b 5:37 **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.** The wine-making process includes harvesting grapes, pressing them, adding yeast, fermentation, storage, bottling and maturation. The expansion of the aging wine would burst the bottle.

^c 5:39 **no one, after drinking old *wine* wishes for new; for he says, 'The old is good *enough*.'** People tend to think that Jesus is saying that new wine is better than old wine. This verse says just the opposite. This simply reads, "The old is good." Remember that Jesus turned water into wine and everyone thought it was the good aged product.

What is the wine in this parable? Is He saying that some things are not compatible? Certainly new patches don't work with old garments and new wine doesn't work with old skins. But what is His point?

Some of the interpretations that have been offered about this two-part parable:

- The most common interpretation offered for this text is that the new wine and the new patches represent new covenant life that is incompatible with the old ways of Judaism. This view pictures Jesus pointing out the inconsistencies of people who are so used to the "old" that they do not want to try the "new." There are a number of problems with this view, not the least of which is that Luke records Jesus saying that old wine is in fact better than new wine.
- John Calvin said that the disciples of Jesus were still too weak to handle the difficulties of discipleship. This view says that they were not yet ready for the self-denial required to follow Jesus, but their day was coming. We could ask, then, how the Pharisees and John's disciples were better prepared to handle the cost of discipleship.
- A better interpretation as I see this text is the one based on what we have already seen. This was not about the law of Moses or about the weakness of Jesus' disciples but about what is "fitting." These people still did not grasp the identity of the One standing before them. This was the King. Fasting could wait. When Jesus is present you party. The presence of Jesus is worthy of the best wine and the nicest clothes.

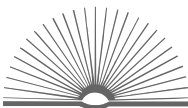
^d 5:33-39 Here are some reminders to you that, as a follower of Jesus, yours should be a life of joy:

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1. The contrast between following Jesus and lesser masters. Look around and see how lasting is the joy given by the things that control your non-Christian friends.
 2. The promise of Jesus' presence. There is a time for fasting over your own decisions and hurts and sins, but the great commission carried with it a promise (Matthew 28:18-20).
 3. The gathering of the people of God. When we gather to hear the preaching of the gospel, pray and remember Lord's death, His special presence is not sobering but satisfying.
 4. The prospect of His return. The sorrow we suffer here is brief and the good we enjoy here is a faint sample of what is prepared for the followers of Jesus.

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