

## A New Way of Doing Things

Mark 2:18-22

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They say the seven last words of any church are: “we’ve never done it that way before.” It means a church that refuses to change and adapt, a church that insists on doing everything the way it has always been done, will die.

Equally dangerous the idea of saying, “let’s do what everyone else is doing” may also be the 7 last words of a church. In this case, you are no longer doing what is best for your congregation or seeking God’s direction for your church, you are now running after a crowd instead of working to build God’s Kingdom. Sometimes change is good, but change for change’s sake is foolish.

Things and times are always changing. I used a typewriter in college and jumped for joy when they came out with erasable typing paper. In those days, the first draft of a paper was the draft you were going to turn in because there was no way you were going to re-type the whole paper! It wasn’t until I came to LaHarpe that I used my first electric typewriter that had a correcting ribbon so you could go back and correct mistakes. Now we have computers and can move paragraphs around and have spell checkers and grammar checkers! Things change.

I remember going to a wedding that someone was videotaping a long time ago. They had huge spotlights that blinded the congregation and produced a grainy video with no sound. At that time the cameraman had to walk around like a pack mule. Now everyone can take better quality wedding videos with their phone than this guy did with thousands of dollars in equipment.

As times and people change our church has changed. We have expanded our footprint (twice), added comfortable chairs, padded the pews, added air conditioning, created a good quality sound system, and then the multimedia system. Each time there were some who did not like the suggested changes, but in the end, they were all well received.

This morning Jesus is going to talk to us about change that is far more extensive than the changes we have been talking about. But . . . before we get there, let’s look again at our text in Mark 2:18-22,

<sup>18</sup> Once when John’s disciples and the Pharisees were fasting, some people came to Jesus and asked, “Why don’t your disciples fast like John’s disciples and the Pharisees do?”

<sup>19</sup> Jesus replied, “Do wedding guests fast while celebrating with the groom? Of course not. They can’t fast while the groom is with them. <sup>20</sup> But someday the groom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast.

<sup>21</sup> “Besides, who would patch old clothing with new cloth? For the new patch would shrink and rip away from the old cloth, leaving an even bigger tear than before.

<sup>22</sup> “And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. For the wine would burst the wineskins, and the wine and the skins would both be lost. New wine calls for new wineskins.”

## **Criticism About The Role of Fasting**

When people talk about fasting today it is usually about weight loss or preparation for a blood test. In Biblical days fasting was seen as a sign of repentance and sorrow for sin or to be more attentive to God when you were seeking an answer or resolution for some issue. You hear people talk sometimes about times of prayer and fasting. So fasting is a legitimate spiritual discipline designed to help you grow in your faith.

Jewish law required one day of fasting a year on the Day of Atonement or Yom Kippur. This was a time when the sins of the people were confessed before God by the High Priest and a special sacrifice was made on behalf of the country in the Most Holy Place of the temple. . . the most sacred spot in Israel.

Most likely John’s disciples fasted regularly because of John’s stress on repentance from sin. The Pharisees however, fasted twice a week as a sign of their devotion to God. This devotion made them swell up with pride. In fact, the Bible indicates the Pharisees worked hard to make sure everyone knew they were fasting. It became a badge of superiority or a sign that they were holy (and, by implication, others were not).

Consequently, when the Pharisees and the disciples of John the Baptist were both fasting the question became: “Why aren’t Jesus and His disciples fasting?” It was a question designed to call into question the legitimacy or the spirituality of the work of Christ.

I’d like to say that this doesn’t happen anymore, but it does! If you don’t worship the same way as I do, the genuineness or depth of your faith may be called into question. If your experience does not match mine, or your way of baptism, or church government, or your view of the end times, or the version of the Bible you use, the kind of music you sing, the length of your prayers, the ministry emphasis of your church is different from mine. . . you are considered suspect as to the genuineness of your Christian profession.

Do you think I am overstating the case? I don’t think so. We are all uncomfortable with those who do things differently than we do. Sometimes the issue is one of right and wrong but many times it is not! Sometimes we just have different ways of doing things. We have different experiences, different tastes, different gifts, and different areas of emphasis.

## **The Lord’s Response**

As so often the case, Jesus responds to his critics with an analogy.

“Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. <sup>20</sup> The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day.

R.C. Sproul wrote,

“Weddings in Israel did not last twenty or thirty minutes, followed by a reception that went on for a couple of hours, after which everyone went home. A wedding feast lasted for a week. It was a time of eating and drinking. No one wanted to be involved in a fast when a wedding feast was on the calendar. That was a time to celebrate and revel.”

We also know there was a rabbinic ruling which said, “All in attendance on the bridegroom are relieved of all religious observances which would lessen their joy.” The wedding guests were exempt from all fasting. This is what Jesus is referring to. You were not supposed to fast during a celebration.

The Lord applied this to Himself. The people of Israel fasted and prayed for the Messiah to come. Why would they fast and pray while he is in their midst? There was coming a day (at the crucifixion) when the celebration would end, and they would fast and pray again.

We are not *required* to fast because we are forgiven and made new. We are now children of the Father, and the celebration will go on through all eternity. However, fasting is good for many other reasons.

Jesus has another analogy,

<sup>21</sup> “Besides, who would patch old clothing with new cloth? For the new patch would shrink and rip away from the old cloth, leaving an even bigger tear than before.

If you have ever repaired garments, you know worn garments shrink the first time they are washed and maybe keep shrinking (I’m sure that is the reason my pants and shirts keep getting tighter). If you have a hole in the garment and patch it with a new cloth, the first time you wash the newly patched garment, the patch will shrink and will tear away from the previously washed garment, and you will have a bigger hole than you did before!

If Jesus stopped at this point in the text, we would be forever confused about the point He was making. Fortunately, he continued.

“And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. For the wine would burst the wineskins, and the wine and the skins would both be lost. New wine calls for new wineskins.

The principle is much the same as the patched garment. When the fruit of the grapes is put into a wineskin it is allowed to ferment. While the wine is fermenting it produces a gas which causes the wineskins to expand. By the time it is fit for consumption, the wineskin is stretched way beyond its previous shape. As the skin dries, it becomes tough.

If someone came along and put their new wine in old wineskins it would turn out badly. The wine would begin to ferment, and the skins that were dried and had already been stretched would hold the wine briefly but when it was time for the skin to expand it would have nowhere left to expand (Much like my belt!). The result would be the wineskin would burst, and the wine would be lost. Thus, Jesus said, new wine demands new wineskins.

Some of us hear these words and think, “Well, those are certainly interesting analogies, but . . . what is the point? Is there some principle we are supposed to be taking away from this?”

The answer is yes: the gospel is bigger than the old Jewish ways. They served their purpose well, but Jesus brought the new wine of the gospel of grace, and the old Jewish traditions could not handle these new teachings and the resulting new reality. It required a new way of doing things.

### **New Wineskins Applied**

In Malachi 3:6 we are told, “I the Lord, do not change”. In Hebrews 13:8 we read “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. So do not be attracted by strange, new ideas.” God’s character, His holiness, and His purpose in creation never change. God’s ways are perfect, they don’t need to change!

Yes, the civil laws of Israel needed to change as the world changed around them. Their ceremonial laws (like sacrifices and washings, and some of the things they did as part of their worship) needed to change because Christ fulfilled these laws. In a sense, they were all designed to point to Jesus.

However, God’s moral law (like the Ten Commandments and the call to “love the Lord your God will all your heart, soul, mind, and strength) never changes! There are people today who say the church needs to “get with the times.” But the thing is: right and wrong do not change just as an inch and a foot do not change. People may drift further in their depravity, but the Lord’s standard holds firm.

Specifically, the ideas of sexual license, half-hearted labor, rampant dishonesty, redefinition of marriage and gender, using violence to take out frustration, abusive behaviors, human trafficking and slavery around the world, and even consumer-focused worship are all things we must NEVER embrace as “new wineskins.” They are not new wineskins! They are the old, depraved behaviors God has always condemned repackaged to tickle the ears of an increasingly godless society.

But there are also some practical new wineskins necessary. First, **we need to learn to think differently**. In Romans 12:2 Paul states it well, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of

God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” The ways of the world don’t work anymore. We must learn to think differently.

- We must think differently about God (He is not far away; He is with us).
- We must think differently about salvation (it is not something we strive to attain; it is something we receive as a gift)
- We must think differently about our values. The world looks at things in terms of what will bring the greatest pleasure or benefit to me. Jesus instructs us to value that which brings God glory.
- We must think differently about prayer. It is more than a reciting of holy words; it is a conversation with God who wants to talk with us about life.

Second, we need new wineskins as we learn to **love more expansively**. We are to treat our enemies differently. The Old Testament talks about “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” In the Old Testament, there was something noble about revenge to right wrongs. Jesus, however, teaches us to “love our enemies.” We are told to forgive, walk the extra mile, and return good for evil.

We are to treat those to struggle differently. We must not dismiss the poor as those who have been cast off by the Lord but treat them as the valuable members of society God sees them to be. The way of the world is to achieve and conquer, the way of Christ is to serve each other. We are to care about the homeless, help the poor, work with prisoners, tend to the sick, help the disabled, and visit the lonely.

God tells us that we should love our mates differently. In the Old Testament women were often treated like property. With the arrival of Jesus and the new life He brings, we are now to honor and cherish each other, protect each other, and serve one another. Our job is to help each other become the best people we can be as we serve the Lord. Christian marriages should be different from those of the world. The idea of domination and making our partner submit to us (which is not the same as choosing to submit to each other) is an old dried-up wineskin.

We are also to love other believers differently. Our Lord has called us to be One. He wants us to see each other as family. We are to work together, encourage each other, celebrate each other, build each other up, support each other, and respect and serve each other. Instead of responding in anger, we are instructed to “be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.”

Jesus wants our relationships with each other to reflect the way God treats us. The old wineskins of rank and status just won’t work.

Third, **we are to use different tactics**. People were expected to come to the temple or to the synagogue for instruction and go to the pools for cleansing. And, let’s face it, the church has adopted a somewhat similar tactic. We meet every week, and we tell people they are welcome to join us at any time. But Jesus wants us to develop a new tactic. He tells us to go into the

world. He wants us to show initiative. He wants us to build bridges, to find the lost, to minister to the sick. He wants us to be like Shepherds looking for lost sheep. He doesn't want us to wait for them . . . He calls us to go and find them. It means taking the initiative, opening the door, and extending the invitation.

Fourth, **we need to view ourselves differently.** When we become Christ-followers we draw our identity from Him. We no longer measure ourselves by our size, our shape, our income, our educational degrees, or how we compare to the "pretty people" in the world. We now see ourselves as one who is loved and treasured by God and gifted in specific ways to contribute to His Kingdom on earth. It doesn't matter what others say about us because we know that we are "fearfully and wonderfully made."

We need to rethink some of the terms we throw around so freely words like: "handicapped," "Learning disability," and "developmentally disabled." These are terms that measure people by how they compare to us as the standard. We naturally believe we are the standard for "normal." Unique people are unique for a reason! We may not see how God is using someone, but that doesn't mean He is not. God created each of us for a purpose. We need to see that people who are different from us are not defective, they are simply different from us. Paul said, "If any man is in Christ, He is a NEW CREATION." God does not make mistakes!

There are many other applications. I believe God would want us to use a new vocabulary . . .to use words others understand rather than our theological terms (justify, sanctify, propitiate (does anyone know what these words mean?) or even more common words like "redeem" or "save"). New modern translations of the Bible may be new wineskins that will help others grow and understand. I believe God wants us to be creative, to use music, technology, and some of the modern tools He has given us. He would ask us to use teaching methods that may be different from the schools. He wants us to be open and look for ways to connect with others. He asks us only to be faithful to the truth which never changes.

The point is, Jesus calls us to a new life. He takes us where we are and transforms us. When we turn to Him, nothing is the same. He asks us to think bigger, to be creative, to take the initiative and to not simply settle for what we have always done. When we follow Him, we need new wineskins or a new way of doing things. We cherish the truth while being open to new ways to deliver that truth to others. He wants us to let the Holy Spirit guide us to the new life He has called us to. The old "us" has been crucified with Christ, and we are now brand-new people who are willing to swim against the current of society to show the world a better way to live.

Open your mind and your heart! Be willing to try new things and reach out to people in ways that will best serve us in our given task to go into all the world and preach the good news of the gospel!