

Luke 5:27 – 39

^{5:27} After that he went out and noticed a tax collector named Levi sitting in the tax booth, and he said to him, 'Follow me.'²⁸ And he left everything behind, and got up and began to follow him.²⁹ And Levi gave a big reception for him in his house; and there was a great crowd of tax collectors and other people who were reclining at the table with them.³⁰ The Pharisees and their scribes began grumbling at his disciples, saying, 'Why do you eat and drink with the tax collectors and sinners?'³¹ And Jesus answered and said to them, 'It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick.'³² I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.'³³ 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.'³⁴ And Jesus said to them, 'You cannot make the attendants of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them, can you?'³⁵ But the days will come; and when the bridegroom is taken away from them, then they will fast in those days.'³⁶ And he was also telling them a parable: '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.'³⁷ 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.'³⁸ But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins.'³⁹ And no one, after drinking old wine wishes for new; for he says, 'The old is good enough.'"

Historical and Cultural Background

- *The Pharisees* were a right-wing political and religious group in Israel focusing on Jewish nationalism and religious piety. They believed that Jerusalem and the Temple had become corrupt because the Jewish leadership in the capital collaborated with Rome. Many also supported militant, revolutionary groups of Jews who were trying to retake the capital and oust the Romans. They Pharisees focused on trying to stay religiously pure by following the Jewish Mosaic Law.
- *Levi the tax collector* worked for the Roman Empire by collecting taxes from the Jews for the Romans. The Pharisees despised Levi. Often when you're a beleaguered minority in a majority culture that is not your own, you feel spiteful towards people who are 'sell-outs.' They seem like 'betrayers' of your people or your cause because they pimp their own community.
- *Eating together* was a sign of friendship and social standing. The Pharisees only ate with each other. Also, the feast was a symbol of the messianic kingdom, a return to Eden. For example:

⁶ The LORD of hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain;
A banquet of aged wine, choice pieces with marrow,
And refined, aged wine.

⁷ And on this mountain He will swallow up the covering which is over all peoples,
Even the veil which is stretched over all nations.

⁸ He will swallow up death for all time,
And the Lord GOD will wipe tears away from all faces,
And He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth;
For the LORD has spoken. (Isaiah 25:6 – 8)

- *Wineskins* had to stretch to accommodate the gases given off by wine during the fermentation process. So already used wineskins, having been stretched, would burst if reused for fermenting new wine.

Possible Introduction Questions (Choose one)

1. Describe having to grow up and give up something childish, like old clothes, old language, etc. What was it like to step into something new? Did it feel awkward? Exciting? Scary?

Questions

1. What's going on at this party? Describe it as you imagine it.
2. How do the Pharisees and their disciples see themselves at this party? How do they see Jesus?
3. How does Jesus see himself?
4. What would the Pharisees say the purpose of fasting is? Generally, the feeling of hunger is an opportunity to remind one's self of our hunger for God. Also, fasting is a way to strengthen our spiritual muscles over our physical appetite.
 - a. Why is it mindboggling for them that Jesus and his disciples don't fast?
 - b. Why did Jesus not require his disciples to fast? Because they were in God's presence by being in his presence.
 - c. Jesus used feasts and celebrations like this as a way to connect himself to the messianic hopes for the kingdom banquet. Why did the Pharisees find it hard to accept Jesus' lack of fasting?
 - d. When Jesus' disciples will fast, what will they be experiencing and commemorating? Jesus' death.
5. Why does Jesus start talking about new and old clothes, new and old wine? How does this work with real wine and wineskins? As wine ferments, carbon dioxide (CO₂) makes it expand. New skins are pliable and stretchable. Old skins are brittle; they break. Thus, new and old are incompatible with each other.
 - a. What are the new things we've seen Jesus do so far? (1) Cleanse an unclean leper, which reversed how contamination usually spread, from the unclean to the clean by touch. This was a new thing. It restored the leper to the community. (2) Forgive sin, which normally required you to be at the Temple and talk to a priest. This was a new thing, too.
 - b. What is Jesus asking the Pharisees to do? Discard the old. Take up the new. Don't try to mix and match.
 - c. What is something new that Jesus wants to do in your life? What old wineskins would have to go for that to happen? We often want to mix old and new, patch the new onto the old but it doesn't work –
 - d. i.e. wanting to receive from Jesus a healthy Christian romantic relationship but not willing to give up current unhealthy ones or an underlying grasping for intimacy; wanting to receive from Jesus more joy and peace of mind but not willing to let go of how we define success; etc.
 - e. What were the Pharisees' old things? Elitism, prejudice, ritual. They hoped that Jesus would fit into those categories and validate them. But he doesn't.
 - f. Why would some people dislike new things? Why would some people prefer old wine? Because it's familiar. NOTE: It's not because older wine objectively tastes better, because in this time, wine was more like juice. People prefer the old because it's familiar. Jesus is being sarcastic.
 - g. What can we expect if we try to fit Jesus into old structures in our lives? What does this look like? We will lose both skin and wine. Christians who don't let Jesus make them new will have the worst of both worlds. They will become hyperactive and burnout, for instance.