

New Wine for New Wineskins

Matthew 9:1-17

God delights to give grace, life, and joy where there was none. He is the one “who gives life to the dead and calls things not existing into existence” (Rom. 4:17). Jesus’ resurrection from the dead was the culmination of this table-turning salvation, but He made all things new throughout His ministry—provoking opposition, opening eyes, healing the broken, forgiving sinners, and astounding everyone. He continues this same work today through the Holy Spirit.

New Authority

Matthew recounts the healing of the paralytic which is described by Mark and Luke with more detail, as man is lowered through the roof by his four friends (Mk. 2:1-12; Lk. 5:18-26). Jesus is in Capernaum, “His own city”, where He sees the faith of the paralytic and his friends by their determination to get to Him. He responds provocatively and kindly: “Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you” (v. 2). Some scribes mutter among themselves that this is blasphemy, which Jesus knows and counters: “Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Arise and walk?’ But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins”—then He said to the paralytic, ‘Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.’ And he arose and departed to his house” (vv. 4-7). It’s easier to say, “Your sins are forgiven” because the verdict is unfalsifiable by the crowd. But everyone can see the man stand up and walk away. Jesus refers to Himself again as the Son of Man, the ruler who receives from God an earthly and everlasting kingdom (Dan 7:13-14). Jesus told the man his sins were forgiven so we would know He has power *on earth* to forgive sins. The word “power” (*exousia*) means authority, the right to command and exercise control. We know from other passages that physical hardship does not necessarily come from specific sin (e.g. Jn. 9:1-3), but it’s possible it did in this case. Regardless, if you come and ask Him, Jesus grants you forgiveness for the sins you’ve committed. All that remains of them is grace abounding. The multitudes “marveled/feared (*ephobethesan*) and glorified God, who had given such power to men” (v. 8). Why *men* in the plural? Jesus will soon give the keys of the kingdom of heaven to the apostles and the church (Matt. 16:19), and we declare on His behalf the forgiveness of sins through Christ. Jesus is our mankind, our Christ. As individuals we confess and receive forgiveness. We also marvel with the crowd at Jesus’ authority, and the healing at work in His kingdom. You have to have eyes to see and the will to look. God’s people have always been forgiven of sin, but there’s a new power, new assurance, and new joy now that Christ has come.

New People

Dale Bruner said the tax collectors were Palestine’s quislings, and the job went to the highest bidder. Matthew sits in the tax office collecting money from God’s people in order to fund their oppression when Jesus passes by and says “Follow me” (v. 9). Matthew hosts many tax collectors and sinners at his house where Jesus and the disciples eat, and this really bothers the Pharisees who are trying to renew Israel by separating themselves from sinners. They eat with specially washed hands and observe a holiness code they believe will revive the nation. How can justice be restored when religious leaders make friends with thieves and enemies of God? They ask His disciples why He eats with these people, and He responds: “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice.’ For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance” (vv. 12-14). Jesus quotes the prophet Hosea who rebuked the Israelites for worshiping carefully while doing

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violence, stealing, and committing adultery (Hos. 6:6-11). The Pharisees neglected the weightier matters of the law, like rejoicing in the fact that Matthew repents receives mercy for his sin. This is how Matthew introduces himself. Jesus confronts us all. Liberal Christians want to “love” everyone and not confront immorality. Conservative Christians have a hard time believing prostitutes, sinners, or government bureaucrats will receive grace. It’s almost certain that Jesus knew Matthew previously, but now he is ready to follow. He knew he was sick and in need of the savior. Jesus doesn’t set aside the law of God but fulfills every jot and tittle. He isn’t getting drunk with sinners but showing them how to feast in His kingdom. How many of Matthew’s friend trusted in Jesus as a result of this and other parties? They would wonder what got into him, ruining a lucrative and powerful career to be hated not just by pious Jews but now also by the political and powerful class. Those who know they are sick and in need of the great physician don’t care. Matthew didn’t care any more. There are many people being drawn by the Holy Spirit who are sick of fear, worry, insecurity, manipulation, trying to be in control, dissatisfaction, bitterness, despair, and the hopelessness of life outside of Christ. Jesus told His disciples to look at the fields, white and ready for harvest (Jn. 4:35). It has never been easier to talk about Jesus. Find those who need a doctor and tell them where He is.

New Wine

John’s disciples are apparently not banqueting with sinners. They want to know why they often fast along with the Pharisees while Jesus’ disciples do not (v. 14). Jesus says the friends of the bridegroom don’t fast until he is gone (v. 15). Similarly, no one sews new, unshrunk cloth on old garment, or puts new wine into old wineskins because the garment will rip and the wineskins burst (vv. 16-17). Weddings often lasted a week in Israel and functioned like our vacations, only full of friends and communal joy. It would be extremely rude and ungrateful to the groom, his family, and the wedding host to fast at a wedding. Jesus already said many will come from east and west to recline at table in the kingdom of heaven (8:11). That kingdom has come and they are looking at it. The disciples must have fasted after the crucifixion, but then they feasted after the resurrection. In the New Testament we see fasting both for repentance in some situations and for clarity in important decisions (Acts 9:9, 13:3). We still should do this as the occasion arises, but we live in the time of the Holy Spirit, of new wine in need of new wineskins. Old wine is good and ought to be maintained in old wine skins. But if you want to drink old wine in 30 years, you better make some new stuff now.

Conclusion

Jesus intentionally challenges unbelief. He has authority to forgive sins and He attacks the evil in our hearts that won’t believe. He invites sinners to Himself—into the church—who will mess things up for religious fussers. He makes new wine and requires new wineskins; all kinds of growth, opportunity, and blessings that require shifts, trust, patience, risk, wisdom, endurance, hope, and sacrifice from God’s people.