**NEW WINE INTO NEW WINESKINS**

February 2, 2020

Mark 2:18-3:12

Key Verse 2:22 “And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins.”

Anyone who washed anything knows that after washing, new clothes shrink. But old wineskins are stiff and worn out. They cannot stretch to accommodate the new wine, rather they will burst open and the wine will spill out. One of the characteristics of the old wineskin person is “unteachable.” In today’s passage, the Pharisees reveal themselves to be old wineskins by their refusal to learn from Jesus, and through their stubborn hearts, holding on to their man-made rules without any concern for people. But many recognized Jesus as their Lord and Savior, because they realized that Jesus values people over man-made rules.

**First,** life in Jesus is joyful (18-22). Look at verse 18. “Now John’s disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. Some people came and asked Jesus, ‘How is it that John’s disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?’” In the Old Testament, there is only one required fast, namely, on the Day of Atonement. So Jesus’ disciples were not breaking the law. Rather, they were not following the tradition made up by the Pharisees. Fasting was meant to be voluntary, connected with earnest prayer. But the Pharisees made the fasting a tool to show off their righteousness. Look at verse 19. “Jesus answered, ‘How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them.’” Fasting was meant to be a means of seeking God. The disciples had God with them in Jesus. They did not need to fast, but could rejoice in the presence of Jesus. Life with Jesus is joyful, like a wedding banquet. Christian life is a wonderful relationship with Jesus, not a set of rules. It is never boring and habitual, but lively and happy. In the last two verses, Jesus explains that his ministry cannot be patched onto the Judaism that was practiced in Israel in his day. Jesus’ life-saving work is something new. It must find the freedom of expression without hindrance from established norms and traditions. Look at verse 22. “And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, he pours new wine into new wineskins.” Jesus compared the Pharisees to old wineskins. They were, in one sense, good and tasty—like old wine with excellent table manners. But their love for God was as dead as the old wineskins. On the other hand, Jesus compared his disciples to new wineskins. They were very rough and young with terrible manners. But they loved Jesus. They were elastic, dynamic, adventurous and courageous in making success as well as in making many mistakes. Jesus did not hesitate to conclude, “New wine into new wineskins.”

**Second**, Jesus declares his Lordship (23-28). One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields with his disciples. The disciples were hungry. Perhaps they had skipped breakfast; they frequently missed meals as they traveled. In their hunger, the kernels of grain began to look very delicious, like freshly baked muffins. Unconsciously the disciples’ hands extended to pick heads of grain. Then suddenly some Pharisees popped up and said to Jesus, “Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?” They wanted to arrest the disciples and take them to prison, or at least give a ticket for Sabbath violation. What the disciples did was allowed according to Deuteronomy 23:25. The problem was that they did it on the Sabbath. It was unlawful according to the man-made rule of the Pharisees. The fourth commandment simply says, “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy…On the Sabbath you shall not do any work.” In their zeal to obtain righteousness by works, the Pharisees made many rules. Keeping the Sabbath became the focal point of the Pharisees. For instance, modern orthodox Jews are very careful about keeping the Sabbath. They do not drive a car, or take a bus. Modern technology required many new rules. Is it lawful to take an elevator on the Sabbath? They decided that it is lawful to ride in an elevator, but it would be work to push the elevator button. Therefore, on the Sabbath, elevators in Israel automatically run all day Saturday, stopping on every floor. Can you imagine it, and empty elevator, all day long going up, up, up and down, down, down. Or a man who wants to go to the 25th floor, waiting while the elevator stops on 1,2,3,4,5,6, even though there is no one else on the elevator. They work so hard at not working! Can this be what God meant by not working on the Sabbath and keeping it holy? Obviously not! Since the Jews turned away from God, they have been living without God, follow an empty, meaningless rules. In this way, the rules become a burden. They look forward to the sunset on the Sabbath so that elevators run normally. In Matthew 11:28, Jesus said, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” Jesus is talking about the weariness under which these people lived under the burdens of man-made rules.

How did Jesus answer? First of all, Jesus taught them that God is not legalistic. Jesus referred to a specific incident in 1 Samuel 21:1-6, when David ate the consecrated bread which was lawful only for priests to eat. David was a man after God’s own heart, the great King of Israel, and the foreshadow of the Messiah. 1 Kings 15:5 says, “For David had done what was right in the eyes of the Lord and had not failed to keep any of the Lord’s commands all the days of his life except in the case of Uriah the Hittite.” (David’s act of eating the consecrated bread is not mentioned here.) God did not see David with legalistic eyes. Rather, God wanted to protect David and to feed him when he was hungry. However, when David violated two of the Ten Commandments, “Do not commit adultery; Do not murder,” God severely punished him. God is holy, but he is not legalistic. God was not upset at the disciples for eating heads of grain on the Sabbath. This was petty legalism on the part of the Pharisees. The Pharisees should have invited Jesus and his disciples for breakfast instead of criticizing them. Jesus also restored to the people the true meaning of the Sabbath. Look at verse 27. “Then he said to them, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.’” In the clutter of detailed rules made by the Pharisees, the original purpose and meaning of the Sabbath had been lost. God did not give the Sabbath to burden man. God gave the Sabbath to bless man. The Sabbath is a gift from God, a day of rest to restore his body, mind and spirit after a week of hard work. God wanted man to have this real rest. The Sabbath was meant to be a day to look forward to. But, when the law is interpreted too legalistically, the Sabbath becomes a burden, a day to dread. Then Jesus declared in verse 28, “So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.” Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath because He is God. Jesus is saying, “I am the Sovereign of this day. I set the standards of behavior of the Sabbath. I am the interpreter of God’s law. I will overrule your man-made rules.”

**Third**, Jesus demonstrates his Lordship (3:1-6). Jesus not only declared, but demonstrated with power that he is Lord of the Sabbath. Jesus went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. His situation was pitiable. He had been born with a grotesque deformity, one of his hands was normal, but the other hand was twisted and useless. He probably hid it in his pocket. Imagine having such a hand. If the barber gives you a bad haircut, you are embarrassed and wear a ball cap until it grows out. But more difficult for the man was his physical difficulties. So many things that we do require two hands. This man could hit a hammer, he could hold a nail. But he could not hold a nail while hitting a hammer. So he could not be a carpenter. He could not play piano. There were many things he could not do. So he was probably poor, and probably felt inferior and ashamed. He must have sat in the back of the synagogue almost unnoticed. But this time, the Pharisees took great interest in him and escorted him to the front. The Pharisees watched carefully to see if Jesus would heal the man. If so, they would immediately charge Jesus with breaking the Sabbath. Notice what they knew about Jesus. They knew that Jesus had the power to heal. They knew that Jesus cared for the sick. Therefore, they decided to accuse Jesus, based on his power and his compassion. What an evil heart. If they know that Jesus has the power to heal, then why don’t they believe him? How can they have such stubborn hearts to not make the connection? It is because they are the old wineskins and simply cannot stretch their minds even an inch. Jesus knew this. Jesus could have avoided the controversy by healing him the next day. However, Jesus wanted to make a point: Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath. Jesus would not be frightened or coerced. Jesus told the man with the shriveled hand, “Stand up in front of everyone.” The atmosphere grew tense. The man must have felt somewhat helpless, caught in a struggle bigger than himself. He had to make a decision to stand up or not. Something about Jesus’ words moved his heart. He felt the love of Jesus and holiness of God in Jesus. He knew it was right for him to stand with Jesus.

Look at verse 4. “Then Jesus asked them, ‘Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?’ But they remained silent.” Jesus’ question made the issue simple and clear. It was really all about motive. They claimed that they were keeping the Sabbath and that Jesus was a Sabbath breaker, but here was Jesus saving lives, and here they were with murderous thoughts on the Sabbath. Look at verse 5. “He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, ‘Stretch out you hand.’ He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored.” We are always surprised when we find Jesus angry in the Bible. Often we picture Jesus with an angelic peaceful face. But what has made Jesus so angry, and so deeply distressed? It is their stubborn hearts. What is a stubborn heart? Stubbornness is to describe a person who is not open to new ideas or ways of doing things. A stubborn person holds on to a view, or an attitude, refusing to change to the point of being unreasonable, to the point of damaging a relationship by putting rules over people. The Pharisees were stubborn, putting their man-made rules over people.

Look at verse 5b. “He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored.” Why did Jesus make such a public spectacle of this man? Forcing the man to stand up in front of everyone, and forcing the man to pull his ugly, shameful hand out his pocket and hold it up for everyone to see. It looks very insensitive of Jesus. It probably hurts the man’s feelings. It took faith, for the man to overcome his shame and reveal his hand for everyone to see. He might have worried that the children would look at him as a monster, and then everyone would think he was ugly. But by faith, he stretched out his hand for all to see. And miraculously, when he did so, his hand was not ugly anymore. Once he held it up his hand was restored. The key word of verse 5 is the word “restored.” Jesus had him hold up his hand, not to be ridiculed but to be restored, even though the Pharisees were watching. Jesus wanted this man to be restored into normal society and not to be ashamed to stand in front of people. He wanted this man to have a clear testimony of his healing.

In our ministry, we emphasize sharing testimonies. Why then do we share testimonies? Often, when people share their testimonies, they bring out ugly, dirty sins. Sometimes it is too ugly to hear. The answer is found in this passage. It is to get healing from Jesus. When we hold up our sins before God, our lives are restored and our sins are forgiven. James 5:16 says, “Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.” Sin is like carrying a block of lead with you all day, and confessing your sin is like being set free from your heavy burden. But when we have a sin problem, the natural instinct is to hide it, keep it in, don’t let anyone see it, like this man with his shriveled hand. Then sin becomes a barrier between us and God and between us and each other. But 1 John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

**Fourth**, Israel recognizes her Lord and comes to him (7-12). News about Jesus spread rapidly all over the nation. Suffering people rejoiced that the oppressive power of the Pharisees had been broken. They rejoiced that the Lord Jesus had come in power to heal and save. When Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the lake, a large crowd from Galilee followed him. Soon, large crowds came from Judea, Jerusalem and Idumea in the south, the regions across the Jordan to the east, and from Tyre and Sidon in the northwest. They were so eager to touch him that they pushed forward forcefully. Jesus was more popular than any athlete or rock star. The disciples had to prepare a small boat for his protection. Jesus healed all diseases and drove out evil spirits. People who had long been oppressed found the love of God, healing, and true freedom in Jesus. Here we see that when the people of Israel found their Lord who could heal them, they came to him in great numbers. But now there was another problem. There were so many people and only one shepherd, Jesus. From now on, Jesus would begin to raise his disciples as shepherds like himself who could serve their suffering people.

In this passage we learn that Jesus’ gospel is new wine. It brought freedom for oppressed people. It required new wineskins to hold it. May God help us to be new wineskins who are elastic to be used for the gospel, not stiff like old wineskins who are stubborn, refusing to change.

Big Idea: Jesus’ gospel is new wine, valuing people over man-made rules.