

## New Life in Old Lives

*Luke 5:17-19; Read Luke 5:36-38*

**W**hen Jesus came into the world as the Messiah, many people just could not accept the fact that He was really who He said He was. He didn't act in the ways that they thought a Messiah should act. He didn't come in and gather an army around Him to destroy the Romans. He didn't wipe out all the injustices, and feed all the hungry people. He didn't heal all the lame, nor give sight to all the blind. The Jewish people, from the pious religious authorities to the common folk, had already made up their minds what the Messiah would be like, and what He would do, and when Jesus didn't fit their preconceived notions, they rejected Him.

Jesus said they were like old wineskins.

It is so easy as a Christian to get into a rut: to always sing the same songs, always read the same Bible verses, always associate with the same people, always do the same things—never being challenged by Christ to venture out into the unknown to experience the untold blessings He has reserved for us. We hear about the riches in glory in Christ Jesus, but we never experience them, because we are afraid to take a step in a direction we've never been before.

For instance, Jesus wants to take us down paths that lead to growth and health as the children of God, but we refuse to walk those paths because we are fearful of what the future holds. We fail to trust God, so naturally we fail. Period.

Our lives have become like old wineskins.

There is nothing wrong with asking questions of the Bible. For example, whenever you see the word "therefore," particularly in one of Paul's letters in the New Testament it is a good idea to ask what it is "there for." Jesus never said anything out of the clear blue sky. He said what He did for a reason, usually in direct response to something that had happened, or to something which had been said to Him. That is the case here in Luke 5, when Jesus tells the parable of the new wine. To grasp the meaning of this parable, we need to look at the events which led up to Jesus' telling it.

Jesus said that if new wine is put into old wineskins, then the new wine will burst the wineskin, and both will be lost. What was He talking about? In that time the skin of a goat was coated with pitch and sealed in order to form a bag. The neck of

the goat formed the opening, and after the new, fresh wine had been poured in, the neck of the bag was closed.

Then the fermentation process would begin. The new skin was soft and flexible, and could stand the expansion which would naturally take place in the process of fermentation. The new wineskin stretched as the wine fermented and expanded.

The reason the old bag could not contain the new wine was that it had already held wine, and had already been stretched as far as it was going to be stretched. It had become dry and cracked and inflexible. It simply could not withstand going through that expansion and fermentation all over again. It would be sure to burst.

Jesus said that instead, anyone making wine would see to it that it was poured into a new, fresh wineskin. He was saying that He had come to give new life, fresh life, and it simply could not be poured into the old wineskins of tradition and prejudice and pride and preconceived notions about the Messiah. He says that the life He gives is an expanding, growing life, and simply cannot be held by tradition or by apathy.

Jesus was saying that instead, this new life must be received and contained by new hearts, new lives, new people. This is a concept that we see throughout the Scriptures. When David had murdered Uriah and had committed adultery with Bathsheba, and when he had become convicted of his own sin, he knew that his life had become like an old cracked wineskin. So when David prayed for forgiveness, this is what he said: "*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me*" (Psalm 51:10).

Paul had experienced a change in his life so real and so vital that his old wineskin of a life became a new wineskin, capable of holding the new life of Jesus. So he knew what he was talking about when he wrote the Christian church at Rome: "*Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.*" (Romans 12:2 NIV)

This change was so vital in his life that when he wrote the letter we know as 2 Corinthians, he said that although the outward man was in the process of perishing, *yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.* (4:16) He was overwhelmed by the daily presence and fellowship of Jesus. He took literally the saying of Jesus that the man who really believed in Jesus as the Son of God would have rivers of living water flowing out of his being.

Well, how can we experience that today? How can this new wine of the life of Jesus be placed into “new bottles,” new lives today? I think we can look in Luke 5 to find at least three things we can do to experience this new life, and to keep the wineskins of our lives soft and flexible, always expanding and growing in the life in Christ.

## **1** **Accept Christ, vv. 17-26**

These verses tell us the story of the man let down to Jesus through the roof by four of his friends. Jesus, looking down at that paralyzed man lying there on his pallet, said to him, *"Friend, your sins are forgiven."* The Pharisees and religious leaders who were sitting there looking for something to get upset over, responded by saying, *"Who is this that speaks blasphemies? Only God can forgive sins!"* Jesus knew what they were thinking and whispering among themselves, so He said to them, *"Which is easier to say: Your sins are forgiven you, or to say rise and walk? But just so you will know that I am the Son of God and that I have authority here on the earth to forgive sins, watch what I am going to do."* So He turned to the paralyzed man and said to him, *"Get up from there; pick up your mat and go on home."*

When the man did just that, all those people who were present—and there were many of them there that day—were confronted with the stark reality that Jesus really was the Son of God—He really could forgive sins! There was more at stake here than just the healing of a man who had been paralyzed. Sickesses and illnesses were considered to be the result of sin, so what was at the center of this event was whether or not Jesus could heal this man by forgiving him, and whether the people would accept Him as the Son of God, or reject Him.

Because their lives were like old, dry, cracked wineskins, they simply could not accept Jesus as the Messiah.

You see, that is exactly what is at stake today. Is Jesus who He said He is? Can He really forgive me of my sin? If He can, that must mean that He is more than a mere man--He must be God! Who else could forgive me of the sins I've committed?

***That*** is what is at stake.

If I ask for forgiveness, and if I repent of those sins, then I am accepting the fact that Jesus is the Son of God. I am accepting what Jesus can and will do for me. I am accepting that new wine, that new life that Jesus offers to all who will believe in Him.

This is the very point where many of us fail. Our lives are like old wineskins, and we just cannot accept the fact that Jesus really is God. We cannot accept the fact that Jesus can forgive us of our sins. We cannot accept the fact that we can have this fresh, bubbling life in us that Jesus talked about. We cannot accept Jesus because of our unbelief, and so we find that our old hearts and our old way of living and thinking is like an old wineskin, dry, cracked, incapable of holding the fresh wine of the way of God.

If you want to experience daily cleansing, daily renewal of your spirit and life, and if you want to experience this new wine of the life of Jesus, then the first step you must take is to accept Him. You must come to the point in your life when you decide one way or the other--*is Jesus the Son of God?*--and then live the rest of your life accordingly. If you want to have what He offers, you must accept Him!

## **2 Crown Christ, vv. 27-28**

Verses 27 and 28 tell us that after Jesus healed this paralytic man, and after Jesus proved that He really was the Son of God, He went out, and saw a hated tax collector sitting at the tax office. Luke tells us that his name was Levi; other Gospels tell us that he was also known as Matthew. He was hated because he was a Hebrew, and he had become a tax collector, working for the Romans. He could collect however much he could extract from the people, and as long as he paid the Roman government, he could keep whatever extra he collected. Tax collectors were considered to be traitors, and were classed with the prostitutes and other sinners.

And what did Jesus do? When everyone else was scurrying past as quickly as they could, what did Jesus do? Jesus did what we would expect the Son of God to do—He stopped and spoke to this one so despised by everyone. And what did He say to him? Did Jesus scold Levi for his dishonest way of making a living? No, what Jesus said to him is what He says to everyone confronted by Him today: *"Follow Me."* And that is exactly what He is saying to us today.

Understand something. It was not too difficult to imagine that Levi or Matthew had seen Jesus before, and knew who He was. He perhaps had heard Jesus teach and had seen Jesus heal. Who hadn't? And Matthew may have been inclined to believe that this man really was the Son of God, and really could forgive sins. But Matthew had never come to the point where Jesus was the absolute Lord of his life—until now. Jesus said, *"Follow Me,"* and the Bible says that Matthew *"left everything, and rose and followed Him."* Matthew was beginning to experience the

fresh infilling of the new wine of life that Jesus came to give. His life was becoming a new wineskin; his old life was becoming a new life! His new life wouldn't fit into the wineskin of his old lifestyle any more!

Most of us here today have accepted Jesus Christ, in the sense that we say we believe that He is the Son of God, at least in our heads. But that is as far as many of us have gone. We have heard Jesus say to our souls, "Follow Me." But somehow we've never obeyed Him, or else we've thought that surely Jesus was speaking to someone else.

Perhaps you were attracted to the fresh, new life that Jesus offers, but you tried to accept it while keeping your old lifestyle. Perhaps you tried to keep your old attitudes, your old way of thinking, your old habits, your old ideas. But the life of Jesus just won't fit into those! Those are your old wineskins. And because we've never crowned Jesus as Lord and King of our lives, we soon discover that our lives have come stale and stagnant. Our lives and hearts have become like old, dry, cracked wineskins, incapable of holding the new life Jesus offers.

I believe that many churches cannot have a fresh work of God in their midst because they are still carting around old wineskins. God won't do something new and vital in their congregations because their old wineskins—their old attitudes, their old traditions, their cracked, worn-out ideas—are simply not adequate to hold what God wants to give them. We pray, "O God, send a revival!" but we haven't been honest enough to notice that our wineskins are already cracked and leaking.

This is the same concept we find in Acts 3:19—"*Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.*" Do you hear it? The concept is the same. "*Repent*"—cast off your old wineskin; "*and turn to God*"—accept the new wineskin; "*that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord*"—receive the new life and power Jesus offers you.

To whom was Jesus speaking when he said in Luke 14:33, "*any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple*"? He was speaking to whoever would follow after Him. He said, "If you're going to be a disciple of Mine, then you must turn your back on those things in your life that are going to hold you back. You must crown Me Lord of your life, if you are going to have this rich, fresh, abundant life I want to give you."

If you have not come to the point in your spiritual life where all your land, your house, your car or truck, your clothes, your reputation, your money, your job, your goals, your aspirations, your educational plans or accomplishments—all of that!—is useless garbage compared to the thrill of knowing Christ, then the Bible teaches that Jesus is not your Lord. And if He is not your Lord, then the Bible teaches that Jesus is not your Savior. You cannot know the abundant, fresh wine of the new life Jesus offers until you have accepted Him, and also crowned Him.

### **3 Share Christ, vv. 29-30**

What Matthew did next puts many modern-day Christians to shame. He didn't go to church every Lord's Day and merely occupy a place in a pew.

Matthew's life was like a new wineskin now, and this river of living water could not have been contained if Matthew had tried. His life was going through an expanding, growing process, and he wanted to share what had happened, and was happening, in his life.

When this happens to us today, the first thing we are inclined to think and believe is that we can share this new life of Christ by simply "living a good life." Matthew wasn't satisfied to simply live a good life. His life was changed, and it was never going to be the same again. So when this river of living water began springing up and out of the being of Matthew, the first thing he did was to give a great feast in his house, and invite all of his friends! What kind of friends would a tax collector have? Other tax collectors! And of course, Jesus was invited. This was the natural thing to do, because Matthew wanted to introduce Jesus to his friends! That was the supreme evidence that his life had become like a new wineskin in Jesus Christ. He had accepted Christ, and he had crowned Christ as his Lord, and now he was sharing Christ.

What happens today when we refuse to share Christ with others? Well, what would happen eventually to that new wineskin? It, too, would become old and dry and cracked, and it, too, would eventually burst. The wine would be lost. And the same thing will happen to your wineskin if you do not share the fresh wine of life. Your wineskin will become dry, and cracked and brittle, and soon it bursts, and you lose the joy and thrill of being saved.

There's nothing wrong with the wine of the new life Christ offers. But our capacity to receive fresh inspiration and vitality from Christ becomes extremely limited.

You've heard about it. You've sung about it. You may have prayed to God asking why you don't have it. You've wanted this abundant, fresh life in Christ for so long, and yet you don't have it. What is wrong?

It could be that you have never accepted Christ. You have never believed with all your heart that Jesus is the Son of God, and that He is God.

Or it may be that you have never gone beyond intellectual belief, and you have never left everything to follow Christ. You've never left your old ideas and attitudes and habits and thoughts behind. You've never crowned Jesus as Lord of your life.

Or maybe you had it at one time. At one time in your life you were joyous and filled with victory in your life in Christ. But you didn't share it, and so you lost the joy of your salvation. You fell back into sin, and you wandered away from Christ.

You can't grow in Christ, and you cannot preserve the New Wine Jesus died to give you, unless your old wineskin of a life becomes a new wineskin. Jesus said, *"No one tears a patch from a new garment and sews it on an old one. If he does, he will have torn the new garment, and the patch from the new will not match the old. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins"* (Luke 5:36-38).

Today, Jesus is calling to you to throw aside your old wineskins, to accept the new and fresh life that He is offering you, to crown Him Lord of your life, and share Him with others.