

Sunday, March 12, 2023 | Onward

Week 9 | Luke 5:33-39 | "The First Parable of Jesus"

On January 1, Pastor Bob kicked off the first sermon series of 2023 entitled "Onward." This series will explore the so-called "firsts" of Jesus' life and how he pressed *onward* into new and unexplored territories. And Jesus' first words tell us that wherever we are and whatever we're doing, we ought to "be about [our] Father's business."

In the second week, we moved from Jesus' *first words* to the *first steps* of his earthly ministry. As we read, God even showed up to mark that magnanimous moment by declaring to all that Jesus was his actual "Son." And just so that Luke's readers do not miss the importance of that declaration, he immediately provides a lineage that proves that Jesus was, in fact, directly descended from God and not only Adam. Through his *mother's* side, Jesus identifies with the *human* race. But through his *Father's* side, Jesus identifies with the *divine* race. And by being the true heir of God, Jesus can transform sons and daughters of Adam into sons and daughters of God.

We discussed Jesus' first recorded run-in with temptation in the third week. And this temptation is a result of Jesus being declared God's Son. A claim of that magnitude had to be real-world tested. And, as we saw, Satan didn't pull any punches. He tempted the Lord to turn stone into bread, to worship him, and to cast himself down from a lofty height. Ultimately, Jesus did not succumb to the Devil. And so, when the Son of God overcame temptation, he made temptation something to be overcome. What does that mean for us? Through the Messiah's victory, we can be victorious over temptation.

In the fourth week, we unpacked Jesus' first sermon. In that message, the Lord laid out his life's purpose: *he is the bringer of "good news."* He came to fulfill God's promises and liberate God's people. And while his words were initially met with overwhelming enthusiasm, the Lord was driven from his hometown and nearly thrown off a cliff. Why? Jesus revealed that the "good news" wasn't only for his friends but also for their enemies, which proved too much for them to swallow. And so, a congregation that had just applauded Jesus nearly killed him. Ultimately, Jesus never did do a great work in his own hometown. And though that is sad, their failings taught us a valuable lesson: **prejudice keeps us from experiencing the wonders of God.** If we think God has only come for "our camp," we can rest assured he will leave us behind and find those who love the stranger as much as the friend.

In the fifth week, we studied Jesus' first few miracles. We saw him not only cast out demons but heal the diseased. And those demonstrations of power further legitimized Jesus' claims and

began establishing his authority in the people's consciousness. But, as Jesus pointed out, he did not come merely to do good works; he was a preacher of the good news. Thus, the Lord's miracles were always subordinate to his message.

In the sixth week, we were introduced to the first disciples of Jesus. Peter, Andrews, James, and John had an interaction with the Lord on the shores of Galilee that forever changed the trajectory of their life. Peter, particularly, was so moved that he ended up leaving the biggest catch of our life behind to follow Jesus. Why? Because he got a glimpse of who the Lord was. And **the greater our knowledge of Jesus, the greater our devotion to Jesus will be.**

In the seventh week, we explored the first theological *controversy* of Jesus. And this controversy arose because Jesus told a paralytic man that his sins were forgiven. This upsets the religious leaders. They rightly countered that only God can forgive sins. Jesus then proves he had the authority to forgive by healing the man of his paralysis. That miracle became an outward demonstration of an inward transformation. And that illustrates a vital characteristic of the Lord's ministry: **Social and spiritual relationships are repaired through Jesus Christ.**

Last week, we were introduced to Levi (also called Matthew), the first *social* outcast of Jesus. And he was an outsider not because he had some debilitating disease that rendered him ceremonially unclean, like the leper, but because of Levi's profession; he was a *tax collector*. Yet, despite Levi's reputation, we'll see Jesus *intentionally* seeking him out and even calling him, of all people, to be one of his disciples. This illustrated for us that **it takes open doors to open hearts**. Though we may be repulsed by a person's sin, we must still love the sinner. After all, Jesus loved us even though we were just as underserving of that love as anyone else.

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Once Easter is over, we'll resume our study of Luke with a series called "Everyday Disciple." In it, we'll explore a part of Luke's account that gives us a peak into the day-to-day activities of Jesus' ministry. In doing so, we'll discover what it means to be like Jesus in everyday life.

But today, we'll be unpacking the first parable of Jesus. A parable is nothing more than an *earthly* story with a *heavenly* meaning. The Lord often points people to something familiar like farming (cf. Matt. 13:1-23) or family (cf. Lu. 15:11-32) to convey some profound theological truth. And here, at the end of Luke 5, Jesus will use clothing and wine-making (two things his

audience could've easily connected with) to reveal an extraordinary revelation: *a new age had dawned*. From this point forward, reality, as they knew it, would begin to change for the better. The only question is, will they embrace this change and improve or reject it and decline? As John Maxwell put it, "Change is inevitable. Growth is optional."

Jesus teaches his audience two life principles using three of life's simplest examples:

**i. Company drives conduct (5:33-35).**

**READ:** Luke 5:33-35 (ESV)

<sup>33</sup> And they said to him, "The disciples of John fast often and offer prayers, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours eat and drink." <sup>34</sup> And Jesus said to them, "Can you make wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? <sup>35</sup> The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days."

Fasting is a vast topic I do not have the time to fully unpack. But you need to know that fasting at this time was a way to express one's penitence to God. Though not technically required, all those serious about their religion were expected to fast on Mondays and Thursdays.<sup>1</sup> Thus, if a known sinner was genuinely repentant, they would be expected to demonstrate their contrition by fasting so that all could see they were serious about their change of heart.

A wedding is for feasting and joy. Wanna know when fasting and mourning were appropriate? During wars, times of great sorrow, and funerals. To party at a funeral would be inappropriate in the same way it would be inappropriate to lament at a wedding. Why? Because to do the opposite of what is appropriate would grieve the host. Jesus is the "bridegroom." He is the one who has called them all to the wedding. For his guests to refuse to feast would be like ignoring him on his "big day." His disciples do not fast because, in Jesus' presence, the right thing to do is celebrate. His wedding guests (disciples) stand on better terms with God through the Lord. Through their association with Christ, they were in an entirely new station. This is not to say that Jesus or his followers will never fast. They will. Jesus makes this clear in verse 35. But feasting is the appropriate response so long as Jesus is with them and in their company.

**Colin Powell famously said, "Wise is the person who fortifies his life with the right friendships. If you run with wolves you will learn how to howl. If you associate with eagles you will learn how to soar."** The company we keep will influence our behavior.

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<sup>1</sup> Edwards, James R., *The Gospel According to Luke*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids, MI; Eerdmans Publishing, 2015), p. 173.

## ii. New revelation and old tradition don't mix (5:36-39).

**READ:** Luke 5:36-38 (ESV)

<sup>36</sup> He also told them a parable: "No one tears a piece from a new garment and puts it on an old garment. If he does, he will tear the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old. <sup>37</sup> And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed. <sup>38</sup> But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins.

Jesus' advent on earth ushered in a new *dispensation* or phase in God's plan. In total, there are seven different dispensations: innocence (Gen. 1:28-30; 2:15-17); conscience (Gen. 3:8-8:22); human government (Gen. 8); promise (Gen. 12:1); grace (Lu. 22:20); Millennial Kingdom of Christ. And, excluding the first, each dispensation is better. Today, we are in the age of grace and are awaiting the commencement of the Millennial Kingdom. And this dispensation of Grace began with Christ.

The dispensation of Grace is what Jesus was referring to in Luke 5:36-38. The Lord is the new cloth and the new wineskin. He is similar to what's come before, but he's also distinct, and, more importantly, he's *better* than what came before. He's the fulfillment of all the O.T. promises and prophecies. And through his death, burial, and resurrection, humanity is reconciled to God not by works of the flesh but by faith.

This is not to say the old traditions were terrible and should be thrown out. Fasting was relevant before Christ and had relevancy after him. The disciples fast in the Book of Acts, and Christians throughout the centuries have fasted. In fact, according to Richard J. Foster's book *Celebration Of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, fasting is one of the four disciplines every Christian should practice in their private life. Abstaining from certain things for a certain amount of time refines our devotion and sharpens our spirituality.

Thus, the traditions that came before Jesus weren't bad. Fasting was and is good. And, by and large, the O.T. Law is precious as it gave humanity a conscience (cf. 1 Tim. 1:8-11). But, practically speaking, it was only good for one thing: condemnation (cf. Rom. 8:1-4). The law could not save. But through Jesus, the law was fulfilled, and all those who put their faith in Jesus will be saved (cf. Rom. 3:19-24).

This is why Jesus will not mix his new way with the old ways of Judaism: **new revelation and old tradition don't mix**. To insist that a person needs to abide by the Old Testament traditions to be accepted by God means that Jesus' work was pointless. And if Jesus' work was pointless, not only would that destroy Christianity, it would ruin Judaism because it was to Christ that all of

the O.T. had been pointing. “The new ways in which God is dealing with humanity through Jesus cannot be mixed with the old ways. The gospel is the new way...to re-Judaize Christianity would have missed the newness of what Jesus brings.”<sup>2</sup> It would be like cutting up a new piece of cloth and sewing it on an old garment or taking new wine and putting it into old wineskins. In both scenarios, everything would be lost.

### **So, what’s the takeaway?**

**Loving *only* what is familiar blinds us to everything that is better.**

**READ:** Luke 5:39 (ESV)

<sup>39</sup> And no one after drinking old wine desires new, for he says, ‘The old is good.’”

In this context, the new garment and new wine are portrayed in a favorable light in contrast to the old garment and the old wineskins, which are shown in an unfavorable light. So, from that, we can see that Jesus is here twisting a positive saying about old wine and giving it a negative slant. Indeed, old wine is typically better than new wine. But when the new wine is Jesus, even the best of the old wines pales in comparison. This is why we should read verse 39 with an ironic or even a sarcastic tone. The Lord was rebuking how some people (i.e., Pharisees, Sadducees, etc.), though presented with a new and better way, will still prefer the old. In fact, considering that this person says "the old is good" rather than "the old is better," we can see that they weren't even comparing two things.<sup>3</sup> Saying “the old is good” is like saying “the old is good enough, why try anything new?”

But if someone ignores the fact that something new is clearly better than something old, what would we say about them? We would say that person is a fool (i.e., a new car vs. new transmission in an old car).

Jesus represents the husbandmen, the new cloth, and the new wineskin. This is not to say that fasting is bad, that old clothing should be burned, or that old wine should be poured out. The O.T. Testament (of which these things are representative) is still good. But Jesus is bringing in something better, something that fulfills the O.T. Testament. He is bringing himself; in doing so, he's getting others into a relationship with God. This is cause for feasting, not fasting. This is cause for donning new clothes and drinking new wine, not putting on the old tattered rags and pulling out the old familiar wine. Jesus was bringing a new age of repentance, acceptance,

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<sup>2</sup> Bock, Darrell L., *Luke 1:1-9:50*, The Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI; Baker Academic, 1994), p. 521.

<sup>3</sup> Morris, Leon, *Luke*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, (Downers Grove, IL; InterVarsity Press Academic, 1988), p. 142.

and restoration. People would no longer have to abide by the law to gain favor with God. That would now be done through Jesus Christ.

How many of you have heard the saying, “You can’t teach an old dog new tricks?” There is some truth in that. As we age, we tend to fall back into those old reliable habits we’ve grown accustomed to, even if those habits are either inferior to something new (i.e., computers) or potentially harmful if left unchanged (i.e., substance abuse). We resist change because we’re creatures of habit who love the familiar and hate the unfamiliar. And so, we need to constantly evaluate ourselves through the Spirit so that we don’t simply do what we do because we’ve always done it that way in the past.

But actually, that saying isn’t entirely accurate. As John Piper points out, it would be more precise to say, “You almost can’t teach an old dog new tricks.”<sup>4</sup> Because I’ve seen in my life quite a few “old dogs” grow and learn new things. And through witnessing such transformation, I’ve realized that you’re only as old as you think. I’ve met flexible, open-minded older people who take to new ideas like a fish takes to water. But I’ve also met inflexible younger people who are close-minded and resist any new idea that does not conform to their preconceptions. Rather than being like a fish in water, these people are more akin to ostriches sticking their heads in the ground whenever they encounter something that contradicts their worldview. Once a young person latches on to an idea, it can sometimes be as challenging to change their minds as trying to change the mind of some 70-year-old. The folly that is a resistance to change crosses generational lines.

### **“The Road Not Taken” by Robert Frost**

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,

And sorry I could not travel both

And be one traveler, long I stood,

And looked down one as far as I could

To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,

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<sup>4</sup> Piper, John, “You Almost Can’t Teach an Old Dog New Tricks,” August 4, 1981, *Desiring God*, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/you-almost-cant-teach-an-old-dog-new-tricks>, [accessed March 9, 2023].

And having perhaps the better claim,  
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;  
Though as for that, the passing there,  
Had worn them *really* about the same,

And both that morning equally lay  
In leaves no step had trodden black.  
Oh, I kept the first for another day!  
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,  
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.

**So, what's the takeaway?**

**Loving *only* what is familiar blinds us to *everything* that is better.**

## Video Description

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Pastor's manuscript can be found here: