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Matthew 9:16 - 9:17



Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

In Matthew 9:16-17, Jesus uses the analogy of putting new wine into old wineskins to explain that his teachings cannot be contained within the old rigid structures of religion. The arrival of Jesus and the new covenant marked a significant departure from traditional religious practices and standards, which offended the religious sensitivities of many. However, Jesus brings a living dynamic relationship with God, rather than just an initiation into religion. This new thing requires a complete demolition of old structures and a willingness to receive new truths.

Transcript

Let's resume our study in the life of Jesus Christ by looking at Matthew 9 and beginning reading at verse 16. Now, many people have communicated to me their confusion over this passage and what was Jesus talking about, putting new wine in new wineskins and so forth. What is this all about? The best way to understand it is to look at the context immediately preceding.

In the earlier verses of Matthew 9, there are three incidents that give some kind of a background for this statement and may help to give understanding of what it means. In the first eight verses of Matthew 9, Jesus healed a man who was paralyzed, who had been lowered through the roof by friends and placed before him. But before he healed the man, he said to the man, your sins are forgiven you.

Many of the observers felt like this was an inappropriate remark because no one could forgive sins except God and Jesus was speaking as if he was God. Well, of course, Jesus was speaking as if he was God because he was. But the point is that Jesus' behavior offended the religious people of his day, the Jewish people, especially the Pharisees.

Then, after that, we read that Jesus called a tax collector, which was a social outcast, especially a religious outcast, to be a follower of his and that night had a meal, or that afternoon, had a meal at this man's house and received criticism from the Pharisees for that also. When the Pharisees saw it, they said to the disciples, why does your master eat with tax collectors and sinners? And Jesus answered, well, it's because those who are

well do not need a physician. Those who are sick need a physician.

And he said, I didn't come to call well men, I didn't come to call righteous men, I came to call sinners to repent. And so that's why Jesus was there. But once again, his behavior offended the religious sensitivities of the Pharisees.

And then, in verses 14 and 15, we find that once again something in Jesus' behavior offended the Pharisees and also the disciples of John the Baptist. And that was that he did not require his disciples to fast as John required his disciples to and as the Pharisees were required to do. Once again, Jesus had too much freedom for their tastes.

He did not require them to do these religious rituals and that offended their religious sensitivities. Now, three times in a row, Jesus offends the Pharisees by being too free and forgiving people, by accepting people who are not the type that the religious crowd would accept, and by not imposing on his disciples the kind of religious rituals that they were supposed to do. That the Jews were accustomed to having placed upon them.

Now, all of these things show a pattern of Jesus' behavior versus that of his critics. Namely, Jesus was bringing a whole new flavor to religion, if we could call it that. The religion of the scribes and Pharisees was a development from the law of Moses.

Now, they weren't following the law of Moses very truly. They also were following the development of it by the rabbis, which went much further than the law of Moses did. Nonetheless, the law of Moses and Judaism was something that God had ordained.

At the time that Jesus lived, that system had been in operation for about 1400 years. It was an old system. Now, Jesus came along and was doing something very different.

He was acting in ways that really challenged those who had the old interpretation of religion, the legalistic interpretation of religion, that felt like religion was ritualistic and that sinners should be shunned and a lot of other things like that. Now, Jesus was not following the practices of these people and that offended them. So, his answer to them was this.

No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth, now if it's unshrunk it means it's never yet been washed, it is therefore a piece of new cloth, on an old garment. Now, of course, an old garment, presumably if it's been worn much probably has been washed and also it has shrunk. So, you've got a piece of cloth that's new and unshrunk being used to patch a hole on an old garment that has shrunk as much as it will.

Now, Jesus said you don't do that, otherwise the patch will pull away from the garment and the tear is made worse. What he means by that is if you've got an old threadbare garment where the fabric is greatly weakened from much wear and much washing and you use a piece of unshrunk cloth and you patch a hole on that garment, then when you wash that garment the unshrunk cloth will shrink and when it does it'll pull tighter

and it'll pull away the fibers of the old cloth that it's sewn to and it'll damage the garment more and make a bigger hole eventually. By the way, I know this from experience because back in the 70s, back when it was fairly fashionable within a certain counterculture to which I belonged, to wear patches on your clothes, I was fairly poor, I should say I was very poor, and I had one pair of jeans and I kept getting holes in it and I would get pieces of cloth of any description, any kind of cloth, any pattern, any color and I would sew patches over the holes.

And these newer pieces of cloth would begin to pull away because they were newer and they were stronger, they pulled away at the weaker fabric and so the holes got worse and worse. Eventually I had to put patches on the patches and then patches on the patches that were on the patches. Eventually I had a pair of pants and the whole legs were nothing but patches showing.

The original cloth was probably not even in existence anymore. But this is the way it is with cloth, it wears out and if you use strong new cloth to patch, you bind it as it were to the old cloth because that's how you patch something, you have to bind it. Then when the new cloth shrinks, the old cloth is not able to accommodate the change and it rips.

Now there's another illustration of the same principle Jesus gives here in verse 17. He says, nor do people put wine, new wine, into old wineskins or else the wineskins break, the wine is spilled and the wineskins are ruined. But they put new wine into new wineskins and both are preserved.

Now wineskins were bags made of goatskin into which wine was poured and sealed in while it would ferment. When they get the new wine from the wine presses, they would put them into these bags that were made of supple goatskin and they were sealed up so that no air could go in or out. And of course as the wine began to ferment, it gave off gases and such that required more space and so it would stretch the goatskin.

And the wineskin would then become stretched to capacity. Eventually of course they would drink the wine, the skin would be emptied and you'd have a stretched out older wineskin there that could stretch no more. Now Jesus said when you have these old wineskins that have already been stretched to their capacity, you don't take and put brand new wine that still has to ferment in these skins because that wine is going to need flexibility.

That wine is going to expand in the process of fermenting. These older wineskins are brittle and inflexible. They've already stretched as much as they can and you'll simply end up breaking those skins open.

As the wine expands, it'll burst the skins and you'll lose the skins and the wine. No, when you get new wine, you need to put it in new skins that are flexible and able to stretch to accommodate its life. Now what do these two illustrations have in common? Well

something quite clearly.

You don't take one item which is going to change and bind it to another item that cannot accommodate change. The unshrunk cloth sewed to a new garment is one example. The new wine that has yet to ferment and change cannot be put into an old wineskin that has no capacity to accommodate such change because you'll ruin things that way.

Now what is the point of Jesus saying this on this occasion? Well Jesus was explaining how he was operating, the assumptions upon which he was operating. He was bringing in a new dynamic, a new life. He was introducing the new covenant.

He was introducing a new thing that the prophets had spoken about. Isaiah had frequently quoted God as saying, behold I will do a new thing. Do not remember the old ways and just, you know, I will make a new thing in the earth.

And also, of course, Jeremiah had spoken of a new covenant that would come. And Ezekiel had talked about a new heart that would replace the old stony heart. Jesus had come to fulfill the prophecies that God would do something new and dynamic and alive.

And he was coming into a society where there was already a religious system in place, Judaism. But that religious system, although it had once been fresh and new, centuries earlier, was now brittle and inflexible. And its rules and its regulations, its restrictions and so forth, were so inflexible that they could not accommodate without offense and without damage.

The new thing that Jesus was introducing. Now what he is saying, therefore, is this. That I am bringing new life into Israel and into the world.

The natural thing for you religious people to do would be to try to contain it. Or try to at least judge it in terms of its conformity to your religious principles that are old and inflexible. And I simply cannot allow my movement to be put under such restriction.

Because your system is so brittle and inflexible that it's about to break. It's about to fall apart. It's like a worn out garment ready to be rolled up and discarded.

It's like an old wineskin that has served its purpose. It has once contained real wine. There was a time when Judaism was the happening thing that God had ordained and God was blessing.

But that was a long time ago. It's now just becoming inflexible, brittle, legalism. And I'm not going to subject my movement, Jesus was saying, to that kind of a structure.

He said new wine is going to be needing a new wineskin. In other words, something flexible. Now what he was, of course, predicting was that in bringing in the new covenant, he was not intending to keep the old covenant around as a structure or an

environment for the new covenant to operate within.

The old covenant was old. It says in Hebrews chapter 8 and verse 13, that when the new covenant has come, it has made the first covenant old and obsolete. And the writer of Hebrews says in that verse, Hebrews 8, verse 13, he says, now that which is growing old is about ready to vanish away.

He's referring to the old covenant and all its trappings, the temple and all of that. Now what Jesus is saying is your old religion is obsolete. Like an old wineskin, it's not going to be used anymore.

You can't put new wine in it again. It's inflexible. It cannot accommodate it.

So I'm going to have to bring in a new container as well as new wine to fill that container. Now what is new wineskins? Well, whatever else may be said about them, new wineskins are flexible. They have not been stretched out yet.

And I believe that Jesus is teaching a principle here, that the life of Jesus, the life of God, the life of the Holy Spirit that Jesus introduced when he was here is a living and dynamic and changing reality. When I say changing, I need to be careful here. God himself does not change.

His principles really do not change. Certainly his standards and morals do not change. But his dealings sometimes are surprising and new.

God sometimes does something that he has not done quite the same before. And we see that in the book of Acts continually. When Peter went to the house of Cornelius and God poured out his Holy Spirit on the Gentiles there, that had never been done before.

And it surprised even Peter and the apostles. They weren't quite sure how to accommodate it. They had to be flexible.

There were times, many times, when God, as he was leading Paul or the other apostles, that he led them to do unusual things. Philip was sent to Samaria. As a Jew, he had always shunned the Samaritans before.

But God did a new thing and brought a revival there that was very different than what they would have anticipated. And so we find that as the Holy Spirit moves on, he does just that. He moves.

He's alive. Now, the legalistic religion of the Jews was not alive. It was just so many rules and rituals.

By the way, there are many Christian organizations that have become just as inflexible and just as unalive as Judaism was at that time. But the life of the Spirit is a life indeed. And he is alive and he may surprise us.

He may overthrow certain cultural norms to which we are accustomed. He may just come in and clean house completely and change everything. Now, he won't change the morals.

He won't change the theology that is true theology. God's not going to change truth because truth is truth. But he may well challenge our perceptions of what we think is true or what we think about certain things because we are human and we know in part and we prophesy in part.

And therefore, God who knows all things may have many surprises for us. And we must be flexible. Now, when I say flexible, let me make my position clear.

I do not believe that God is going to give us any additional scriptures. Nor do I believe God is going to reveal anything to us that is not already found in the scriptures. Okay? Let me make that very clear.

As far as I'm concerned, the scriptures given through the prophets and the apostles are the foundation for the church. The church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. And therefore, everything that must be done in the growth of the church must conform to the size and shape and dimensions and the whatever, the designations that are found on the foundation of the building, which is the scriptures.

God may show us that some things we thought we knew in the scriptures we didn't understand correctly. And we have to be flexible about that. We need to be willing to say, well, maybe the traditions I've learned, even my traditional understanding of certain verses of scripture, I may have to be open to God showing me clearly that there's something, a different thing there for me to see in that.

Flexibility is necessary. You know, during the Jesus movement in Southern California, I was at Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa, where Chuck Smith is the pastor. I wasn't there at the very beginning of the Jesus movement, but I got in pretty early in 1970.

And sometime shortly before that, Chuck Smith had allowed and encouraged hippies to come to church, because there were a lot of hippies who were coming to church and finding Christ. And when they found Christ, they still dressed and wore their hair and their clothes like hippies. Now, in those days, of course, people didn't come to church in T-shirts and jeans normally.

I know, because I went to church for years before that. You didn't come to church in jeans and T-shirts before 1970. But when the people began coming to Calvary Chapel, these people were newly converted hippies, and sometimes not yet converted hippies, but on their way.

And they were coming barefoot. They were coming in jeans and T-shirts and whatever else they happened to have on. And there was one of the pastors there, I won't name

him, who put up a sign on the door before the service and said, Do not wear jeans and bare feet into the church.

Well, Chuck Smith, the pastor, actually got to church early and found this sign on the door that another pastor had put on there. And he was furious. He tore it down.

He said, Who put this sign on the door? And the pastor who had done it identified himself. And Chuck said, Why did you put this up there? And the man said, Well, because these hippies, their bare feet is soiling the carpets. And the rivets on their Levi's are scratching the wooden pews.

And Chuck Smith said, Well, then we'll tear out the carpets and the pews, but the Jesus people are staying. And that kind of flexibility was unusual back then. We find a lot more flexibility now, partly because that ground was broken by people like Chuck Smith in the early 70s.

But I'm not trying to deify him by any means. I'm just trying to say that there showed an unusual degree of flexibility in challenging the norms that had been passed down, that you have to dress up to go to church. The Bible doesn't say that.

That's a tradition. And there are many other traditions that the Holy Spirit might challenge, traditions that we think are scriptural. But once He begins to challenge them, we should take another look at the Scripture and say, Well, does the Bible really teach what we thought it did? And we may find that the Holy Spirit is leading us into more truth, into more light, not by giving new Scriptures, but by helping us to see the Scriptures that we have more purely, without the presuppositions and traditions covering them over.

Actually, the teachings of Jesus were not new teachings at all. He was doing just what I've suggested. He was uncovering the real scriptural teachings from all the baggage and the tradition that the Pharisees had heaped on top of them.

He was teaching the original truth of God that was found in the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms. But they had obscured it with their traditions, and so have we in the Church many times done similar things. So the Holy Spirit requires that if He's going to bring us into all truths, and He's going to uncover things and expose our traditions and get us back to a more pure understanding of the Scriptures, we're going to have to be flexible like new wineskins.

What Jesus is bringing us is like life, like new life, like wine. Wine is, among other things, consciousness-altering if you drink enough of it. And so is the life of the Holy Spirit.

He comes to renew our minds and to change our perceptions and to change our consciousness, even as wine eventually does if you take enough of it. And it's a living thing, wine is. And that's why it expands.

It has living organisms in it. And what Jesus came to bring was a living thing, a living dynamic relationship with God that would not just be a transactional entrance into religion through initiation, but actually an ongoing communion with God, a walk with God from the day that a person meets God to the day they die. And in the course of walking with God for many years, you should find that the Holy Spirit has surprises for you.

If He does surprise you, or if you are confronted with certain truths or practices or ideas that are new to you, don't accept them immediately just because someone claims they're from the Holy Spirit. I've seen many weird things presented as if they were from the Holy Spirit when I have no reason to believe they were His at all. But when you are confronted with something new, rather than being inflexible and critical just because the thing is new and it's unfamiliar to you, go to the Scriptures.

Search the Scriptures and see if these things are so. I was raised in a church that did not teach anything about the baptism of the Holy Spirit. And when I first went to Calvary Chapel in 1970, I was confronted with people who had the baptism of the Spirit.

I never had heard of that. And rather than just accept it, although I did see tremendous fruit in the lives of those who professed to have that, I wasn't sure if that was from God or not. I certainly had never heard of that.

And so I went and I searched the Scriptures. I studied them for several weeks and I became convinced that this baptism of the Holy Spirit that others were talking about was indeed a biblical norm. And so I pursued it and received it myself.

And this I give simply as an example of how we need to be willing to challenge our conventions and our traditions in light of the Word of God. That we will meet people who will challenge our views. Possibly this radio program will challenge some of your views.

But if it does, don't accept what I say because I say it, but rather go to the Word of God, search and look and see if these things are true. This is certainly what Jesus encouraged His critics to do. It is something that we find honest people typically did do in the Bible.

Remember the Bereans in Acts chapter 17? They heard Paul speak and they didn't just receive him immediately. They went and searched the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. And because they did, they then received the new truth new to them.

It was not new because all truth is old because truth doesn't change. But many truths that are very old may become new to you if you have been taught wrongly or have accepted traditions. And therefore we need to be like new wineskins.

Flexible to accommodate the life of the Spirit that Jesus brings and that He wants us to continue walking in. Well, we're out of time for this session. And so we will continue our study of the Gospel of Matthew next time.

I hope you'll be able to join us.