



# THE PARABLES OF JESUS

## THE CLOTH AND WINESKIN

### ***Before Life Group***

*Read Mark 2:18-22*

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There is power in a good story.

Throughout the Gospels Jesus employed parables, or stories, to communicate the complex truths of the nature of God, the Kingdom of Heaven, and what faith looks like expressed in the world. The parables allowed the complex, unfathomable truths of God to be simplified and understood by all people to bring them closer to God. In understanding the truth, the people could apply it to their lives and grow in their faith. In Mark's Gospel, many of these parables are recorded as a part of the Gospel record.

One of the first comparisons that Mark includes in his Gospel record comes in the form of explaining wine and wineskins. "No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. Otherwise, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse. 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." ([Mark 2:21-22, NIV](#)) This conversation came on the heels of Jesus being questioned by the Pharisees as to why the disciples were not fasting.

The Pharisees had, at first, sought to be the primary teachers and instructors of the truth of God. They memorized the Torah, knew it forwards and backwards, and studied to understand their glorious God greater and greater. Furthermore, this was not a bad thing. The problem arose when they began to teach and require things beyond the scripture. Rules were tightened or added so as not to even come close to rebelling against God. More and more, as the religious leaders of the day, they tightened the noose of sin and unrighteousness around the necks of the Israelites by making holiness even further off and God less and less approachable. The God who had once tabernacled with the people was now a far-off sight that the people were unable to approach.

Thus, on this particular day, the Pharisees had set this day apart for fasting. The law only required that the people fast on the day of Atonement, which this day was not. The Pharisees added this feast, sometimes up to twice a week of full fasting. Jesus, though, being the Word of God and understanding it fully, had no need or desire to obey man's religious customs. The disciples were not required to fast because their teacher, their rabbi, was the ultimate authority. The Savior had come to be with them and live with His people. This was no time for fasting, but for celebration. Thus, Jesus explained the coming New Covenant that he would establish through two metaphors the people would have understood: clothing and wine.

Clothes oftentimes would tear and requiring patching. Since the old cloth had already shrunk, putting new cloth on the old cloth would shrink according to its use and wear, and tear the cloth even more. The clothes

must either both be new or both be shrunk. This is an example of how the old and the new systems were incompatible. As wine fermented, the wineskin would stretch and expand according to the wine. After their use, the old wineskins would be brittle and unable to stretch anymore. When new wine would be added, the wineskin would tear, unable to hold the contents.

Throughout the courses of Jesus' life, He simultaneously fulfilled the requirements of the Old Covenant while instituting the New Covenant. The Old Covenant was not bad, but people were unable to fully meet its requirements, let alone the additional requirements of the Pharisees. Thus, the relationship between God and His people would not only stretch and expand but also would not fit within the confines of the Old Covenant. Even for you and me today, through our faith in Jesus Christ, we step into our new life and put to death the old life.

## **The Old Covenant Fitting Into The New**

The Old Covenant primarily hinged on adherence to the law of God and to meet the standards of holiness and righteousness to approach God. The temple provided the people with the opportunity to sacrifice animals for the sins of the people. Sin's cost required that blood be spilt, a cost the people could not pay themselves and survive. Thus, the law provided the roadmap for righteousness and the perfect sacrifices provided the path to forgiveness. However, humanity was still unable to meet the requirements of either. With no amount of sin being acceptable and no sacrifice being perfect, no solution to the issue of sin and imperfection could be found.

The solution came in the person of Jesus Christ. He alone would be worthy to bear the burden of our punishment and He alone would be able to save mankind. God is perfect and Jesus is fully God. His coming meant that the Old Covenant was coming to a close. The Old Covenant sought our obedience in pursuit of our salvation and our acts were unable to produce any form of righteousness or salvation. The old system was passing; and on our behalf Jesus sought to institute the new system based on His sacrifice and forgiveness.

With the New Covenant our salvation comes from faith in Jesus Christ and His work on the cross. Through his sacrifice we are sanctified and established in our new life. We cannot earn this nor can we accomplish this on our own. It is a gift by the grace of God, and His mercy is extended to us. It is precisely because we were unable to earn or merit our own salvation that Jesus came. Just like the disciples were not fasting because of the presence of the Messiah, Jesus' presence is cause for celebration. God descended to earth to be with us out of His great love for us, seeking a relationship not based on actions but on grace.

Furthermore, this New Covenant does not fit into the Old Covenant. If we seek to continue to attempt to earn our salvation and earn the love of God, we will always come up short. In putting our attention on our sins attempting to live in the New Covenant, the tear in our souls will only continue to widen. The New Covenant is not about cleaning ourselves up in order to present ourselves before God, but rather coming before God in our broken and sinful state and allowing God to transform, renew, and redeem us. We do not strive to "do good enough" but strive to rest in the presence of God. Our works are a product of our faith, they do not produce the faith but are the byproduct of them. From the overflow of the grace and mercy of God comes our abundance of good works, through His strength and ability alone, not ours.



## Fitting Our Old Life Into The New

The Pharisees often times, in our modern culture, get a fair amount of criticism regarding their place in history. They are viewed as the enemies and the people directly responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, we accuse people of being modern day Pharisees when we feel they are becoming too legalistic. We do this all while absolving ourselves of any responsibility to safeguard ourselves against the same thing. There are things we must do or not do in order to be seen as “a good Christian.” Our works are the means of our salvation, seeking to purify ourselves rather than lay bare before the throne of God. We attempt to hide our shame from an omniscient God instead of running towards Him to receive His gift of forgiveness and redemption.

On the one hand we condemn those who sought to conform Jesus to their constructed practices, and on the other hand cling to areas of our lives we want to keep. We teach a holiness that sets us as the example and while completely ignoring the sin in our own lives that remains unchecked. We add criteria for what constitutes a true believer and harshly condemn anyone who falls outside of that same criteria. The sin of the Pharisees was not legalism but a failure to extend the grace of God to the world around them, tightening the requirements instead. We are as guilty as trying to fit the new wine of Jesus Christ into the old wine skin of who we were before our lives were redeemed and renewed by Him. Our past sins are looked on fondly for their temporary pleasure and we yearn for just one more time.

Your old life is gone. It cannot fit into the new life that Christ has set for you. God has placed your feet on a new, firm foundation. He has awakened you from your spiritual slumber of death and given you a new life. Do not lament the passing old life nor attempt to fit it into your new life. The old life produced your own death and although there was temporary pleasure, there would be eternal death. Instead, celebrate the new life. You have been plucked from the fingers of death’s grasps and made to live for eternity by the grace and works of Jesus Christ. The relationship with the King and Friend has been secured and your home awaits you in heaven. The old has passed and the new is greater than your wildest dreams could produce, simply because you will be with God, forever.

## Discussion Questions

Read Mark 2:18-22

1. What reasons does Jesus give for His disciples not fasting? How is this different than what the Pharisees were saying?
2. How is the Old Covenant different than the New Covenant? How does Jesus fulfill the Old Covenant and enact the New Covenant?
3. Does Jesus’ fulfillment of the Old Covenant imply that it was a bad covenant? What does the Old Covenant reveal about the nature of God?
4. What is the danger in attempting to fit our past lives into our sanctified life and future eternal life?
5. Why is our old life passing away a good thing? What benefits are there in stepping into our new life? How does Jesus Christ usher us into our new life with Him?
6. What are some of the past sins of our previous lives that we tend to romanticize?
7. In what ways has Jesus redeemed you personally? What are some of the effects of the new life that you are stepping into? How have you seen these effects impact your life?



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**About the Author.**

*Pastor Daniel Burton lives in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida. In May 2015, Daniel graduated from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary with his Master of Divinity. It was here that he began to explore his passion for Theology and deeper exploration of the word of God. Daniel believes that, at its core, Theology should be fun. Check out more of his work at <http://thegospeloutpost.com>*

