

“New Wine,” Matthew: Life and Words of Jesus, Part #28 – Matthew 9:9-17 – Joshua Harris – February 17, 2013

Introduction

1. In Matthew 8 and 9, Jesus demonstrates total authority over sickness, creation and demons. In Matthew 9:9-17, Jesus' authority is expressed differently: Jesus has the authority to rearrange and reprioritize our lives.
 - a. These verses include two stories in which Jesus is questioned about his religious practices. In the first story, the Pharisees ask Jesus' disciples why they are sharing a meal with people who are sinners. How can Jesus be righteous if he is spending time with the disobedient and unrighteous? In the second story, the disciples of John the Baptist ask why Jesus and his disciples don't fast.
2. In each of these interactions, Jesus is asked why he doesn't follow the religious customs and rituals of the day. Jesus responds by saying that no one would ever use a brand new, unshrunk piece of cloth to patch an old garment. When it is washed and dried the new cloth would shrink and enlarge the tear. Nor does one put new wine in old wineskins. The fermentation of the new wine expands and would burst the old wineskins. Jesus' point, and the main point of these verses, is: The new doesn't match the old.
 - a. Here's the spiritual lesson Jesus is teaching: Being a disciple means being filled with the new life of Jesus. This new life of the Kingdom of Heaven doesn't match the old patterns of dead, formal religion that is all about outward show. The new life we are given in Christ – the new life of the Kingdom – transforms our rituals and practices. The way “we've always done things” can never override Jesus' authority and his priorities for us.

Priority #1: People over Policies (verses 9-13)

1. In the first story, Jesus calls a hated tax collector to be his disciple. Then he shares a meal with other tax collectors and sinners. In Jesus' day, these were despised people: tax collectors collaborated with the occupying Roman army and cheated the Jews by inflating taxes and profiting from the overage. They were viewed as cheating traitors who deserved to be shunned. That was the policy: you don't approve of or get involved with sinners.
 - a. And this policy had biblical warrant. Psalm 1:1 says *“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers.”* So when the Pharisees see Jesus sharing a meal with tax collectors and sinners, they react, “How can this be! He's breaking the law! He's violating the policy!”

Sermon Outline

2. Jesus responds by stating that a physician doesn't spend time with the healthy, but the sick. In the same way, Jesus spends time with sinners not because he approves of their sin but because he has come to rescue them from their sin and call them to righteousness. Then Jesus points the Pharisees back to Hosea 6:6 and says, *"Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.'"*
 - a. The Israelites in Hosea's day followed all the rules and rituals about sacrifices but they missed the heart of God's Law. They abused each other instead of showing mercy and love toward their neighbor. In his commentary, Craig Keener sums it up well, *"Hosea addressed a people satisfied with their ritual but displeasing to God."* The Pharisees of Jesus' day were no different.
 - b. A contemporary equivalent would be a person who faithfully attends church and care group, tithes on his gross income, walks in purity, reads Christian books during lunch break and goes on missions trips every summer. This is good and is part of living a godly life. But if that same person never walks across the street or down the hall to reach out to the weak, the lonely, the needy or the lost, their religious "policies" or practices are no different than the Pharisees of Jesus' day.
3. The way of Jesus is to prioritize the seeking of lost sinners over perfect religious policy. God desires mercy over sacrifice.

Priority #2: Relationship over Ritual (verses 14-17)

1. The second story deals with a question about fasting. The question comes from the disciples of John the Baptist: "The Pharisees fast; we fast. So why don't you and your disciples fast?"
 - a. Jesus responds with the imagery of a wedding feast. You don't go to a wedding feast to mourn and fast. You go to celebrate! In the same way, the disciples have Jesus, the bridegroom, with them. It's a time to celebrate and enjoy being with him. Jesus says that fasting will be appropriate when he is taken away – alluding to the time when he is crucified and later ascends to heaven. Then his disciples will fast as an expression of their longing and need for him.
2. The ritual of fasting is a good spiritual practice. But it serves the greater purpose of a cultivating our intimacy and relationship with Jesus. We fast to create a hunger and longing for Jesus. Fasting's has value as it builds and strengthens our relationship with Jesus. This is what it means to prioritize relationship over ritual. What matters most is knowing, seeking and being close to Jesus.

Sermon Outline

- a. The Pharisees were accomplished experts in their ritual of fasting. They exercised incredible discipline and self-denial. But they missed Jesus! The Son of God was standing before them and they didn't recognize him. The tax collectors and prostitutes and outcasts of society found salvation first because they saw their sin and their need for Jesus' grace.
- b. We need to be careful not to let our good religious practices overshadow the heart of Christianity – having a real, personal, vibrant relationship with Jesus.

Conclusion

1. A living relationship with Jesus doesn't match old, dead religious practice. The "new wine" of a vibrant, inner spiritual life and relationship with Jesus has to be matched with new structures, practices and habits. We need to put people before policies and relationship with Jesus over ritual.
2. We need to make sure that our traditions aren't keeping us from following and obeying Jesus. Traditions can be wonderful tools and can help us remember and celebrate truth. But we need to make sure the Holy Spirit is directing our priorities not our traditions.

Fellowship Starters

1. Take time as a Care Group to read Matthew 9:9-17.
2. Jesus spent time with "sinners". How are you cultivating relationships with those who are unbelievers?
3. Jesus told the Pharisees to "Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.'" What do you think this would look like in your relationships with unbelievers?
4. Are there any spiritual disciplines that you are doing out of ritual rather than to know, love and fellowship with Jesus? If so, how can you redirect the purpose of those practices to cultivate your love for Jesus?
5. What uncomfortable situations have you experienced while reaching out to unbelievers whose worldview is dramatically different than yours?
6. Are there any dead practices in your life that do not match the new life in Jesus that you have now?