

The Parables
Luke 5:27-39
(New Patches and New Wine)
“Life Without Patches”

Introduction

His name was Levi. To trace the origins of the name we must go all the way back to **Genesis Chapter 29**. Leah was the wife of the patriarch Jacob. He had never wanted to marry her in the first place, but was tricked into doing so. Jacob was madly in love with Leah's younger sister, Rachel. It was Rachel that he had wanted to marry, but her father Laban wouldn't allow her to marry Jacob unless he first married Leah. Laban was apparently worried that he would never find a suitable husband for his oldest daughter, so he took matters into his own hands to see to it that she was provided for. The Bible describes Leah as “having weak eyes” which could mean anything from the fact that she wasn't much to look at, or simply that she cried a lot. As it turns out, it was probably a little of both, for she spent her whole life just wanting what most of us want, to be loved and to be needed. God could see that Jacob had no real devotion for Leah, so He saw to it that she was blessed with having children. Her third son, she named Levi, which means “to join”. She named him thus, because she had hoped that her husband would see that she had value, since she was giving him such strong boys to carry on his namesake. Leah had hoped that by the time little Levi was born that Jacob would be drawn to her and would finally “join” with her as every woman wants from her husband. Unfortunately, Leah was always made to feel like she was second class. God, however, didn't see her that way at all.

Thousands of years later, we see another man named Levi, who also wants to belong. He had made some really bad life choices in the eyes of his Jewish brethren. Levi had managed to land for himself a very lucrative position with the Roman government collecting taxes. He was indeed a wealthy man as a result. For in those days, tax collectors were required to collect a certain amount of taxes for the government, and whatever they could collect above that required amount could be pocketed for themselves. It was a very lucrative occupation indeed, but due to its unscrupulous practices, it also caused the tax collectors of Rome to have had many enemies as well. Tax collectors in the land of Israel, although they were Jewish in heritage, were banned from going to the temple or any of the synagogues. They were pariahs in society. The only friends they had were all the other outcast like themselves.

The scriptures tell us that Jesus “saw” Levi sitting at his toll booth. More than likely, the young man had been stationed at a booth in Capernaum along the shores of The Sea of Galilee in order to collect tolls for the busy road there, as well as a tax upon the fish caught each day in the lake by the merchant fishermen. Jesus “saw” him working there. The word in the Greek actually means *to observe closely; to look with intent*. It was the same word that was used in those days to describe how someone would watch a play, or other live performance. Our word “Theater” is actually derived from this word. You see, Jesus didn't see Levi for what he did. He looked closer and saw Levi for who he was. He could see that this man felt empty inside. He could see his desperate need to live up to his namesake and be “joined” to something with meaning. Having all the money in the world will not satisfy a man's soul. Only Christ can do that! Jesus saw Levi, so despised by his own and said to him simply, **“Follow me (vs. 28)”**. In that life changing moment, this publican walked away from the career he had thought would bring him happiness and stepped into the light. He “joined” himself to Jesus that day and was no longer called Levi. From that day forward, Jesus called him “Matthew” which means “*gift from God*”. The young tax collector had finally found what his soul had been longing for. He found his purpose. He found The ONE, who didn't see him for what he did, but rather saw him for what he could become. To the Pharisees and other Jews in the land, he was a traitor to be despised, but Jesus saw him as precious gift from God!

The Pharisees (whose name means *to separate*) couldn't understand how a man who called Himself a Rabbi (teacher), such as Jesus did, would ever associate (join) with undesirables such as Matthew. They had sent a delegation to follow Jesus around and report his exploits back to their leadership. The man from Galilee had become so famous that the Pharisees wanted to make sure that He was not a “false prophet”. The more that they saw of who He associated himself with, the more they saw Him taking it upon Himself to “forgive sins” (**vs. 21**), which could only be done by God Himself, and the less they cared for Him. Jesus, in their opinion, needed to be stopped. After all, if He really was from God, then He would have known to obey the many burdensome rules of the Pharisees, would He not?

But instead, he seemed to hold those sacred traditions in contempt. He refused to march to the beat of their legalistic drums, and as a result, they had written Him off as a fraud. They needed only to expose him publicly so that the people could see this as well. Unfortunately, He loved the common people, and as a result they had loved Him. This enraged the Pharisees all the more. They pressed round the home of Matthew when the new disciple of Christ gave a party in honor of his new found Savior. Matthew wanted his friends to have a chance to meet the One Who, in an instant, had so changed his life. Jesus was more than happy to meet with all of them. The Pharisees, who wouldn't have been caught dead in the home of a publican, must have waited impatiently out in the street like a group of protesters. While Jesus and his disciples were inside having a great feast, and the time of their lives, these self-righteous ideologues were just waiting to pounce upon them with accusations when they remerged onto the narrow street. What a sight that must have been to behold: a party on the inside and a riot on the outside!

When Jesus came out, they began asking their questions, hoping to expose Him as a fake. **"Why do you eat with sinners?", they cried. "Why don't you fast and pray like John's disciples?"** (as if they had any respect for the followers of John the Baptist in the first place). Jesus answered them, as He often did, in the form of an illustrative parable. He talked of New Patches on Old Clothes; of New Wine on Old Wineskins; and the Lovers of Old Wine. They probably didn't understand a word that He was saying, but He gave them some very deep truths to ponder that day. Truths that we should ponder as well.

New Patches on Old Clothes

I read somewhere that there are approximately 613 separate rules (laws) in The Old Testament! Let that sink in for a minute... SIX HUNDRED and THIRTEEN! The Law given in The Old Testament is a representation of the Holy Perfection of God. God knew when He gave The Law that absolutely no one would ever be able to fully live up to its requirements. The Law was given, therefore, as a "baby sitter" (**Galatians 3:24**) until the final solution to man's sinful nature could be cured once and for all by The Messiah. Jesus would come and live a life that perfectly fulfilled every single one of those 613 commandments, and then, give His life as a ransom to pay the debt of those of us who could not do so for themselves. He lived a perfect life and died an atoning death. The fact that I couldn't obey the laws of God does not keep me from inheriting eternal life, because Jesus PAID my debt of sin. We are saved by GRACE, through FAITH, and not because we have met the requirements of The Law. In other words, because we have trusted in Jesus to keep His promise to forgive and save us, then we too can JOIN with him as Matthew did. This is the message of The Gospel. To those who first heard it (like Matthew), this was a radical and new truth, that God would accept someone based upon, not what they had done, but what Jesus had done FOR them!

The Pharisees actually believed that they were able to fully meet the righteous requirements of God by simply living according to the letter of His Law. As we stated earlier, the word Pharisee actually comes from a Hebrew word meaning to "separate". These men (and yes they were all men) really thought that they had set themselves apart as holy in the sight of God by their own good works. Not only did they pride themselves in "obeying the law", but they actually added hundreds of new laws to expand the old ones! For example, The Bible tells us that we are not to work on the Sabbath day. We are commanded to take a day each week to rest our bodies and souls from work, because our Creator designed us to do so. The Pharisees actually had 39 separate laws to help define what would be considered "work" and could not be performed upon the sabbath day! They had even determined how much weight a person should be able to lift on the sabbath. By their law, a person who lifted anything that was heavier than a fig on the Sabbath had actually sinned! Talk about insane. These guys actually thought that God was pleased with them, because they were adding additional burdens upon the people in an effort to make themselves appear set apart before The LORD.

Jesus had forgiven the sins of a paralyzed man in the very presence of The Pharisees (**vs. 20**) just days before His invitation to Levi. When the Pharisees called Him on it, He told them that the "Son of Man" had the power to forgive sin (**vs. 24**). They knew that this was an Old Testament title given to The Messiah (Anointed One) that would one day come to Israel (**Daniel 7:13-14**). When Jesus called Himself "The Son of Man" they realized that he was claiming to be this Messiah. They mistakenly believed that The Messiah would wholeheartedly endorse their methodology when He came. The fact that Jesus

referred to their way of thinking as an “old garment” or an “old wineskin” must have been hard for them to hear. They were lovers of The Old Testament Law. The reason that they loved it is because they had fooled themselves into thinking they had actually kept it. They were so enamored with The Law that they had added their “new patches” to it, believing that by doing so they were honoring God. Jesus didn't come to add more patches to the old. He came to bring in the new. Just as it would be foolish to sew a new patch to repair an old and worn out piece of clothing, Jesus explained to them that what He was bringing to the world was far superior. He didn't come to “patch us up”. He came to make us new. He didn't come to patch up our old sinful clothing. He came to clothe us in HIS righteousness!!! We aren't saved by being good. We are saved by His grace. Where we could not be perfect, He was perfect FOR us! He brought a radical change when He came. He didn't do away with The Old Testament Law, but rather, He completed it. Through him, we have been empowered to live a holy life, where we never could before. We didn't need any more rules added to patch up the Old Covenant. We needed to be remade from the inside out, so that we could live according to God's commands. If any man be in Christ, he is a NEW CREATION (**2 Corinthians 5:17**).

New Wine in Old Wineskins

Just as it would be foolish to sew a new patch on worn out clothes, it is equally as foolish to pour new Wine into old Wineskins. Wine in those days was placed into wineskins made from animal intestines or stomachs. As the wine fermented, the gasses it produced would cause the wineskins to swell. After many uses, the wineskins would become dried out and cracked. At this point they were no longer useful for the fermentation process. New wine poured into an old wineskin would create more pressure than it could handle and the skin would burst. Jesus came to make us new. He died on the Cross of Calvary, so that we could be filled by His Holy Spirit. We cannot be Spirit-filled by living a good moral life. We can only be Spirit-filled by being born again. How do we become born again? By humbling ourselves before Christ and asking for Him to forgive us and fill us. When we surrender ourselves to His will and trust His word BY FAITH, then He makes us new. We are filled with His Spirit and forever changed, from the inside out.

The Pharisees thought they could please God by having the outward appearance of holiness, but Jesus said they were like “whitewashed tombs”, beautifully adorned on the outside, but filled with death within (**Matthew 23:27**). This is exactly how God sees someone who thinks that their good deeds are enough to satisfy His holy nature. Every true follower of Christ has had to come to grips with this truth: “Without Christ, we are wretched.” We need a savior. Sitting there in his lonely toll booth, Levi could see it as clear as day, but the Pharisees who should have understood this truth better than all men, were blinded to it. The ones that they so despised were flocking to Christ to accept His forgiveness, while they sneered at Him, because he dared to reject their self-righteousness. They were hopelessly lost, while multitudes of sinners were being found. What a tragedy, when a person believes that they are too good to need God.

Lovers of Old Wine

Jesus actually calls out the Pharisees as “Lovers of Old Wine” (**vs. 39**). I have often wondered if they actually “got” what He was saying to them. The simple truth of his message was that those who have deceived themselves into thinking that their own goodness will be enough to save them will never accept “The New Wine” that Christ came to offer. He came to give salvation, by grace through faith, but those who think of themselves as good will never bow their knees and ask for the new wine that only Jesus can give. Every time I take communion, I am reminded that Jesus gave his life so that I might truly live. Levi was willing to give up everything so that he could “join” with Christ. His name was forever changed to “Matthew”, because he was willing to humble himself and receive “The Gift of God”. Have you received that gift today? His name is Jesus, and He has a cup of new wine poured and ready for you. He doesn't look at you to see what you have done, but instead, He sees you for what you will become. Surrender your life to Him today. Leave it all behind to follow Jesus. Join yourself to Him and receive the gift of God.

And ALL of God's people said... TRUTH!!