

Jesus' Most Puzzling Parable

On Sunday, we resumed our sermon series called “The Beauty of Christ – Living in Me” by studying one of Jesus’ most puzzling parables – a parable about the proper storage of wine.

1. Warm-up Question: What’s your favorite beverage of choice?
2. To understand Jesus’ parable about wine, we first have to understand the context that gave rise to it. When Jesus came on the scene, traditional religious people found him puzzling. He didn’t do things the way most religious people did, which led to lots of questions and opposition. In Mark 2, there are three different situations where Jesus disregards a religious rule. In each instance, the Pharisees demanded to know why.

Read Mark 2:13-17

- a. In Jesus’ culture, there was a longstanding religious rule, derived from Old Testament regulations, that required religious people (“clean”) to abstain from fellowship with irreligious people (“unclean”). To this very day, even many Christians refuse to fellowship with “sinners.” What may have been the concern that gave rise to this rule?
- b. Have you ever been on the receiving end of “shunning,” i.e., religious people refusing to associate with you because you’re too “bad”? How did it feel?
- c. Why do you suppose Jesus blew through this old rule and befriended “sinners”? Was this a “good” thing for Jesus to do? Why or why not?

Read Mark 2:18-20

- a. In Jesus’ culture, deeply religious people were expected to fast twice a week (Luke 18:12). What’s the purpose of fasting? Is it a good thing to do?
- b. Why didn’t Jesus require his disciples to follow the common pattern of fasting?

Read Mark 2:23-28

- a. The Bible commands that we do no work on the Sabbath, even incidental work like kindling a fire or picking up sticks. Yet Jesus allowed his disciples to violate the Sabbath rule by harvesting and shucking grain when they were hungry. What concerns may have given rise to the Sabbath rule?
- b. Why did Jesus permit his disciples to violate the Sabbath rule?
- c. As best you understand, what does Mark 2:27 mean?

- d. Jeff suggested that we see a consistent pattern in each of the foregoing instances. In each instance, Jesus elevated spiritual values (kindness, compassion, love, etc.) above religious rules. Do you think that's a fair assessment?
3. Read Mark 2:21-22.
 - a. What do the old cloak and old wineskins represent in this parable?
 - b. What do the new clothe and new wine represent?
 - c. What happens if Jesus' new wine is poured into the old rules-based approach to religion?
 - d. So what's the main lesson we're supposed to take from this parable?
 4. Paul summarizes Jesus' new-wine message this way: "If you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to religious rules. . . [because] the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no rule against such things." Galatians 5:18, 22-23. The essence of this new model is laid out on page 3.
 - a. Which model (the old or the new) comes closest to how you were taught to think in the churches of your past? Did that model feel to you?
 - b. Why do you think so many churches follow the old model, demanding absolute compliance with rules?
 - c. Jeff said that one of the dangers of the old model is that rules are confined by the limits of human language and therefore cannot possibly anticipate every situation. So rules can end up being applied in ways never intended. For example, the rule about abstaining from blood (Acts 15:29) is used by some Jehovah Witnesses to prohibit blood transfusions. When in your life have you seen a religious rule applied in a destructive way? What do you think Jesus would have done?
 - d. A second danger of the old approach is that rules can change behavior, but can't change the heart. So someone can end up being a zealous rule keeper, but still have a bad heart. Have you ever been around someone like that? Tell us about it.
 - e. In the new approach, religious rules play an advisory role, rather than a mandatory role. What's the difference?
 - f. Some people get really nervous about having the freedom to make values-based ethical decisions. They worry that our own human discernment is so tainted by sin and selfishness that we need to be bound by mandatory rules because can't be trusted to faithfully decide what's right and wrong. Is there a good answer to that concern? What insight does Jesus offer in John 16:12?
 - g. How would you prefer to live your life? By the old model or the new? Why?

How Jesus Changed Religion

