

The Greatest Life Ever Lived

A Study in the Incarnate Life of Jesus Christ and An Exposition of the Four Gospels

LESSON XXXI : THE CALL OF LEVI / THREE PARABLES OF HIS DISCIPLE'S FEASTING

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John	related passages
9:9-17	2:13-22	5:27-39		

The Call of Levi

Matt 9:9 And as Jesus passed forth from thence, He saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and He saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed Him.

Mk 2:13,14 And He went forth again by the sea side; and all the multitude resorted unto Him, and He taught them. And as He passed by, He saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the receipt of custom, and said unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed Him.

Lk 5:27,28 And after these things He went forth, and saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom: and He said unto him, Follow me. And he left all, rose up, and followed Him.

Matthew receives his call while sitting at his tax collector's booth or customhouse, the place where the tariff was collected on the traffic of goods passing along the international highway between Syria and Egypt. "Sitting before his custom-house, as on that day when Jesus called him, Matthew must have frequently heard Him as He taught by the sea-shore. For this would be the best, and therefore often chosen, place for the purpose. Thither not only the multitude from Capernaum could easily follow; but here was a landing-place for the many ships which traversed the Lake, or coasted from town to town. And this not only for them who had business in Capernaum or that neighborhood, but also for those who would then strike the great road of Eastern commerce, which led from Damascus to the harbours of the West. Touching the Lake in that very neighborhood, it turned thence, northwards and westwards, to join what was termed the Upper Galilean road." [Edersheim, *Life of Messiah*]

That Levi and Matthew is the same person is undeniable when comparing the three gospels; e.g., Luke calls Levi a publican (Lk 5:27) and the listing of the twelve disciples calls Matthew a publican (Mt 10:3). In the lists of the twelve the name Matthew replaces Levi (Mt 10:2-4; Mk 3:14-19; Lk 6:13-16; Acts 1:13). "Matthew" means "gift of Jehovah". That he was a Jew is inferred by his and his father Alphaeus' name and his acquaintance with the OT. Being a tax collector, Matthew would have been experienced in writing and keeping records, well-versed in several languages (at the minimum, Greek and Aramaic). Considering the brevity of the description of his call would imply he was a modest, humble man, and possibly a man of few *spoken* words (note no place in the gospels does it record Matthew actually *saying* something).

The tax-buyers or "farmers" had paid a fixed sum of money to the Roman government for the privilege of levying tolls upon imports / exports as well as whatever merchandise passed through the area. The main tax offices were located in Caesarea, Capernaum and Jericho. The farmers would sublet their rights to "chief publicans" (Lk 19:2) who employed "publicans" to do the collecting. Charging whatever they could, they became known as extortionists. If a Jew, they were further hated for being a renegade and a traitor. **"A publican:** (telōnān), from telos *a tax*, and ōneomai *to buy*. The collectors of Roman imposts. The Romans farmed out the direct taxes and customs duties to capitalists, on their payment of a certain sum *in publicum*, *into the public treasury*, whence they were called *publicani*, *publicans*.... They were often chosen from the dregs of the people, and were so notorious for their extortions that they were habitually included in the same category with harlots and sinners. 'If a Jew could scarcely persuade himself that it was right to pay taxes, how much more heinous a crime must it have been in his eyes to become the questionably honest instrument for *collecting* them. If a publican was hated, how still more intense must have been the disgust entertained against a publican who was also a Jew.' The word 'publican', as a popular term of reproach, was used even by our Lord (Matthew 18:17). Even the Gentiles despised them. Farrar cites a Greek saying, 'All publicans are robbers.' " [Vincent, *Word Studies*] "The publicans, especially such as, like Matthew, were of Jewish origin, were hated and despised by their fellow-countrymen more even than the heathen themselves. They were excommunicated, and deprived of the right of tendering an oath before the Jewish authorities." [Godet, *Luke*]

There were two types of tax collectors: the general tax-gatherer (the *Gabbai*) who collected ground-tax, income-tax, and poll-tax. The other was the custom-house official (the *Mokhes* or *Mokhsa*) of which Matthew was classed. While there were injustices among both classes, the custom-house tax-collector was worse. "The classical reader knows the ingenuity which could invent a tax, and find a name for every kind of exaction, such as on axles, wheels, pack-animals, pedestrians, roads, highways; on admission to markets; on carriers, bridges, ships, and docks; on crossing rivers, on dams, on licences, in short, on such a variety of objects, that even the research of modern scholars has not been able to identify all the names.... But even this was as nothing, compared to the vexation of being constantly stopped on the journey, having to unload all one's pack-animals, when every bale and package was opened, and the contents tumbled about, private letters opened, and the *Mokhes* ruled supreme in his insolence and rapacity. The very word *Mokhes* seems, in its root-meaning, associated with the idea of oppression and injustice. He was literally an oppressor.... **What has been described in detail, will cast a peculiar light on the call of Matthew by the Saviour of sinners. For, we remember that Levi-Matthew was not only a 'publican,' but of the worst kind: a *Mokhes*.**" [Edersheim,

“Jesus saw Levi and said no more than *Follow Me*. Levi *left everything* (a detail found in Luke only) *and followed him*. This must have meant a considerable sacrifice, for tax collectors were normally wealthy. Matthew must have been the richest of the apostles. We should not miss the quiet heroism involved in this. If following Jesus had not worked out for the fishermen, they could have returned to their trade without difficulty. But when Levi walked out of his job he was through. They would surely never take back a man who had simply abandoned his tax office. His following of Jesus was a final commitment.” [Morris, *Luke*] “It is well-nigh certain that Matthew, who lived and worked in Capernaum, the very place where Jesus had chosen as his headquarters, had frequent previous contacts with the Master and that when the call came he had already surrendered his heart to Him and the cause He represented. Nevertheless, when he now not only makes a clean break with his occupational past and joins the One who called him, declaring to the whole world that it is to Jesus that he has unreservedly dedicated himself, he performs an act of devotion whose sacrificial character must not be minimized.” [Hendriksen, *Matthew*]

Resorted ... taught: “The imperfects are graphic: *kept coming, kept teaching*.” [Vincent, *Word Studies*]

He saw: (Lk 5:27) denotes looking *attentively*. “Etheasato does not signify merely *He saw* but *He fixed His eyes upon him*. This was the moment when something peculiar and inexplicable took place between Jesus and the publican.” [Godet, *Luke*] Wuest: *And after these things He went forth, and He saw a collector of internal revenue names Levi seated at his desk in the collector’s office, and He attentively contemplated him.*”

He followed: “Imperfect. He *began* to follow, and *continued* following.” [Vincent, *Word Studies*]

Matt 9:10 *And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples.*

Mk 2:15 *And it came to pass, that, as Jesus sat at meat in his house, many publicans and sinners sat also together with Jesus and His disciples: for there were many, and they followed him.*

Lk 5:29 *And Levi made Him a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them.*

While Matthew modestly refrains from making a big deal out of it, Luke records that immediately after his call Matthew hosts a large banquet for Jesus in which he invited all his publican friends. Matthew only mentions this in passing. “*A great feast*, a splendid entertainment. The word refers more properly to the number of the guests, and the manner in which they were received, than to the quality or quantity of the fare. A great number of his friends and acquaintance was collected on the occasion, that they might be convinced of the propriety of the change he had made, when they had the opportunity of seeing and hearing his heavenly teacher.” [Clarke, *Commentary*]

The banquet was for tax collectors and sinners, for they both had something in common: neither regarded the rules and regulations as set forth by the religious leaders of the day, making the low reputation they had acquired both deserved and undeserved. But the point is that Jesus had come to deliver man from their sins and miseries. This is something Matthew understood while the Pharisees were too self-righteous to see. “His companions, it appears, were not of the most creditable kind. They were tax-gatherers and sinners, a word which I believe in general signifies heathens throughout the Gospels, and in several other parts of the New Testament.” [Clarke, *Commentary*]

Matt 9:11 *And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto His disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?*

Mk 2:16 *And when the scribes and Pharisees saw Him eat with publicans and sinners, they said unto His disciples, How is it that He eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners?*

Lk 5:30 *But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against His disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners?*

The Pharisees did not approach Jesus with their comments but rather His disciples. Either they did not have the courage to approach Jesus Himself or they hoped to induce division within the ranks of His followers, “divide and conquer”. **We too must be wary of those who would whisper in our ears. They may believe they are passing along information worth repeating, but often it is only a tactic of Satan to divide the church.** There is much within scripture concerning gossip and Christians are very lax about obeying these admonitions concerning having two or three witnesses, approaching the “guilty” party first to straighten out the matter, overlooking faults in love rather than repeating them, suffering our “rights” being violated for the cause of Christ, etc. **When we ignore God’s commands concerning gossip, seeds of discontent are sown and this will always damage the cause of Christ as well as hinder our personal growth.**

Meals, especially in the Oriental culture, implies friendship and fellowship. What the Pharisees did not grasp is that having fellowship with “sinners” is entirely proper at times. **This is the Christian balance: keeping friendships and contacts with the lost while maintaining a separation from the world. To do this without being self-righteous but loving is difficult and requires the guidance of the Holy Spirit.**

The sense of “their scribes” is probably a reference to the fact that the scribes were under the authority of the Pharisees. Vincent agrees that these were “scribes of the Pharisees”. Wuest: “*And the Pharisees and their men learned in the scriptures...*”

Matt 9:12,13 But when Jesus heard that, He said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

Mk 2:17 When Jesus heard it, He saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

Lk 5:31,32 And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

Upon hearing of the matter, Jesus responds with a proverb of the time. “When He associates on intimate terms with people of low reputation He does not do this as a hobnobber, a comrade in evil, ‘birds of a feather flocking together,’ but as a physician, one who, without in any way becoming contaminated with the diseases of His patients, must get very close to them *in order that He may be able to heal them!*” [Hendriksen, *Matthew*]

By implication, Jesus is attacking His accusers in the same breath. Are they not the ones who are so “righteous”? (or so they thought of themselves). Then why are they themselves not out seeking to help these “sinners”? This is the point of his quoting Hos 6:6. The context of Hosea is that of an iniquitous nation which continually dwelt in religious sins against God as well as robbery and murder. Yet they continued their outward rituals of sacrificing of which God said is a mockery. God said through Hosea that a genuine manifestation of “goodness” was what God desired than burnt offerings. **“When without a genuine change of heart and conduct sacrifices were nevertheless brought, this amounted to dead ritualism, loathsome to the Lord. ‘Religion’ without goodness or kindness is worthless.”** [Hendriksen, *Matthew*] “Accordingly, Jesus bids these doctrinaires, in a passage found only in [Matthew’s] gospel, to read their Bible again, and to discover from Hosea 6:6 how completely in accordance with the will of a merciful God it was that He should make contact with these ‘sinners’ instead of avoiding them in the interests of ritual correctness. **It was mercy that found favour with God, not sacrifices offered by those who felt themselves to be morally superior.”** [Tasker, *Matthew*]

Jesus continues His illustration: “as a physician goes to the sick, I did not come to call the righteous but I came to have mercy and call the sinners to repentance.” “A common proverb, which none could either misunderstand or misapply. Of it the reader may make the following use: (1) Jesus Christ represents Himself here as the sovereign Physician of souls. (2) That all stand in need of His healing power. (3) That men must acknowledge their spiritual maladies, and the need they have of His mercy, in order to be healed by Him. (4) That it is the most inveterate and dangerous disease the soul can be afflicted with to imagine itself whole, when the sting of death, which is sin, has pierced it through in every part, infusing its poison everywhere.” [Clarke, *Commentary*]

“Go ye and learn, a form of speech in frequent use among the rabbins, when they referred to any fact or example in the Sacred Writings. **Nothing tends more to humble pretenders to devotion than to show them that they understand neither Scripture nor religion, when, relying on external performances, they neglect love to God and man, which is the very soul and substance of true religion. True holiness has ever consisted in faith working by love.”** [Clarke, *Commentary*]

“No need: The Greek order throws the emphasis on these words: *No need have they that are strong of a physician.* [Vincent, *Word Studies*] Wuest: “*And having heard, Jesus says to them, No need do they have who are strong, for a doctor, but those who are ill.*”

They that are whole. Both Matthew and Mark use ‘ischuontes’, *the strong*. This use of the verb in its primary sense, *to be in sound health*, is found in Luke 7:10; 15:27; and once in 3 John verse 2. For this meaning it is the regular word in medical writings. Paul uses it only in the metaphorical sense: *sound doctrine, sound words, sound in faith*, etc. See 1 Timothy 1:10; 6:3; Titus 1:13, etc.” [Vincent, *Word Studies*]

Three Parables on Fasting

Matt 9:14 Then came to Him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but Thy disciples fast not?

Mk 2:18 And the disciples of John and of the Pharisees used to fast: and they come and say unto Him, Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but Thy disciples fast not?

Lk 5:33 And they said unto Him, Why do the disciples of John fast often, and make prayers, and likewise the disciples of the Pharisees; but Thine eat and drink?

“Fasting is, in the Bible, either a sign of disaster or of voluntary abasement of the spirit.” [Cole, *Mark*] “Devout persons in Israel fasted twice a week (Lk 18:12), on Mondays and Fridays, the days on which it was said that Moses went up Sinai; this particular day may have been one or other of these two days. But we may also explain it: *fasted habitually*. They were fasting persons, addicted to religious observances in which fasting held an important place.... Moses had nowhere prescribed monthly or weekly fasts. The only periodical fast commanded in the law was annual — that on the day of Atonement. The regular fasts, such as those which the adversaries of Jesus would have had Him impose on His disciples, were one of those pharisaical inventions which the Jews called a *hedge about the law*, and by which they sought to complete and maintain the legal system.” [Godet, *Luke*] “Probably meaning that they did not fast so frequently as the others did, or for the same purposes, which is very likely, for the Pharisees had many superstitious fasts. They fasted in order to have lucky dreams, to obtain the interpretation of a dream, or to avert the evil import of a dream. They also fasted often, in order to obtain the things they wished for. The tract, Taanith is full of these fasts, and of the wonders performed thus by the Jewish doctors.” [Clarke, *Commentary*]

To the favor of these disciples which were still clinging to John's leadership (although in prison at the time), at least they approach Jesus directly and not His disciples (cp Pharisees above).

If this passage is chronologically attached to the preceding, then the contrast set forth is heightened: while the disciples of Jesus was feasting, the disciples of John was fasting causing the question of fasting. Some however place a time separation between the two events. The difference is unimportant, and the same lesson is being taught regardless of when it happened. And regardless of whether there is a strict *chronological* connection between the two, there is definitely a *logical* relationship. "It was probably the presence of the disciples of Christ at Matthew's feast on one of the Jewish fast days that occasioned the complaint of John's disciples and the Pharisees. It is sad to see disciples of John aligned with the Pharisees against Jesus." [Robertson, *Harmony*] Note the progression: John the Baptist gathered his disciples as he proclaimed the coming Messiah, and those disciples rejoiced under John's preaching. But as the Messiah came, some (in preacher worship?) continued with John and were even jealous of the attention being given to Jesus (Jn 3:22-36, lesson 26). As John was removed from them they continued in his teachings, refusing to move their allegiance to the Christ. Now as the Messiah which John proclaimed is in the midst of His ministry, the disciples of John which had such a good start becomes allies to those who hate Jesus. **Jesus will not be second-place to anyone, and any misplaced admiration of one of Christ's servants is the turning from the path Christ would have us go. This always hinders spiritual growth and may eventually lead to that person turning from the way of Christ completely.** As a personal illustration of that principle, I once admired a former pastor who was indeed a Pastor's Pastor. He was undoubtedly one of the most pious men I have ever been blessed to sit under, and without realizing it my admiration became misplaced. But the Lord would not allow that and prior to this man retiring, the Lord had so worked that not only did I no longer "worship" this pastor, *I was glad to see him go!* Years have mellowed my emotions and I believe I now hold the man in a proper perspective: I admire his good qualities yet acknowledge he has "kinks in his armor". **Put any Christian on a pedestal, and the Lord will remove the pedestal!**

Parable #1: The Children of the Bridechamber

Matt 9:15 And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.

Mk 2:19,20 And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? as long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days.

Lk 5:34,35 And He said unto them, Can ye make the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days.

The gist of Christ's answer was that you cannot have a mournful fast at a wedding feast. **"His presence brings joy like that of a wedding party. Really to follow Christ is to enter a happy experience."** [Morris, *Luke*] "Bridegroom's attendants fasting while the feast is in progress! How absurd, says Jesus as it were. Disciples of the Lord mourning while their Master is performing works of mercy and while words of life and beauty are dropping from His lips, how utterly incongruous!" [Hendriksen, *Matthew*]

Jesus continues however to mention that their joy will be removed and they will mourn, a reference to His death. Jesus, as at the Passover when He declared "destroy this temple..." again predicts His death. "The verb and tense indicate a stroke of violence, by which the subject of the verb will be smitten." [Godet, *Luke*] This mourning would not be of long duration as pointed out in Jn 16:16-22. By the resurrection their mourning was again to turn to joy.

Sons of the bridechamber: literally, the bridegroom's attendants; not to be confused with the friend of the bride which could be compared to today's "best man". The sons (children) of the bridechamber were friends of the groom who stood close to him. They had been invited to the wedding and were in charge of the arrangements, making sure the festival was a success. "Paranymphs, friends of the bridechamber, companions of the bridegroom, who act for him and in his interest, and bring the bride to him. How can they be sad?" [Bruce, *Gk NT*] "These persons were the companions of the bridegroom, who accompanied him to the house of his father-in-law when he went to bring the bride to his own home. The marriage-feast among the Jews lasted seven days; but the new married woman was considered to be a bride for thirty days. Marriage feasts were times of extraordinary festivity, and even of riot, among several people of the east." [Clarke, *Commentary*] **"Children of the bride-chamber:** literally, *sons....* The sons of the bride-chamber are different from the groomsmen. They are the guests invited to the bridal. The scene is laid in Galilee, where groomsmen were not customary, as in Judaea. Hence there is no mention of them in the account of the marriage at Cana. In Judaea there were at every marriage two groomsmen or *friends of the bridegroom.*" [Vincent, *Word Studies*]

We cannot ignore the fact that the disciples here are not represented by the bride but by the 'children of the bridechamber'. As mentioned in lesson 26, it is important to remember that **parables and illustrations are word pictures to develop a greater truth.** Elsewhere the church is portrayed as the bride to convey certain truths (e.g. Eph 5:23) while in other places even the nation of Israel is portrayed as the bride (e.g., Isa 50:1ff; 54:1ff; 62:5; Jer 31:32; Hos 2:1ff). No one that holds to the local-church doctrines would teach national Israel was part of the church, yet that OT picture cannot be denied. **Remember: the over-emphasis of parables, illustrations and word pictures leads to false teachings. Each illustration must be considered for what it is teaching on it's own, in it's own context.** While a parable may be "stretched" to develop good preaching points, it is unwise to use that as a doctrinal foundation. If a local-church Baptist would make the statement that the disciples here do not represent the church and Jesus' reference to them as the friends at the wedding therefore has no bearing on the doctrine of the

church, one should be consistent to state the same concerning Jn 3:29 since those same disciples were the ‘bride’ in that illustration while John was the ‘friend of the bridegroom’. If our chronology is close to being correct, that illustration was given possibly half to a full year prior to this illustration.

Parable #2: New Cloth on an Old Garment

Matt 9:16 No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse.

Mk 2:21 No man also seweth a piece of new cloth on an old garment: else the new piece that filled it up taketh away from the old, and the rent is made worse.

Lk 5:36 And he spake also a parable unto them; No man putteth a piece of a new garment upon an old; if otherwise, then both the new maketh a rent, and the piece that was taken out of the new agreeth not with the old.

Jesus uses two illustrations taken from everyday life to show how inappropriate it would be for the disciples to *now* be fasting, as if a great calamity had descended upon them by the coming of Christ. “The main lesson conveyed is that the new order of things which Jesus by His coming has ushered in, bringing healing to the sick, liberation to the demon-possessed, freedom from care to the care-ridden, cleansing to lepers, food to the hungry, restoration to the handicapped, and above all salvation to those lost in sin, does not fit into the old mold of man-ordained fasting.” [Hendriksen, *Matthew*]

No man putteth a piece of new cloth: “New: from ‘not’ and ‘to card’ or ‘comb wool’; hence to *dress* or *full cloth*, therefore *undressed* cloth which would shrink when wet, and tear loose from the old piece.” [Vincent, *Word Studies*] If a patch of unfulled wool was placed on an old garment, when the patch becomes wet and shrinks, it will pull to pieces the bordering cloth of the badly worn garment. The patch which was intended to repair the original tear would produce an even larger tear.

“His mission is not to labor to repair and maintain an educational institution, *now decaying and waxing old*. **He is not a patcher, as the Pharisees were, nor a reformer, like John the Baptist. It is a new garment that He brings. To mix up the old work with the new, would be to spoil the latter without preserving the former....** What a view of His mission this word of Jesus reveals! What a lofty conception of the work He came to accomplish! From what a height He looks down, not only on the Pharisees, but on John himself, the great representative of the old covenant, the greatest of those born of women! ... How can any one, after this, maintain that Jesus was not conscious from the beginning of the bearing of His work, as well of the task He had to accomplish in regard to the law, as of His Messianic dignity? How can any one contend that the Twelve, to whom we owe the preservation of this parable, were only narrow Jewish Christians, as prejudiced in favor of their law as the most extreme men of the party?” [Godet, *Luke*]

Note Matthew and Mark implies there is only a single damage: that the old cloth is torn when the new shrinks. But Luke implies the patch was made by cutting from a new garment, which therefore constitutes a double damage: both to the old and to the new.

“Seweth: A word found in Mark only. Matthew (9:16) and Luke (5:36) use *throweth upon*, as we speak of *clapping* a patch upon.” [Vincent, *Word Studies*] Note the details a servant would notice is brought forth by Mark only.

Parable #3: New Wine into Old Wineskins

Matt 9:17 Neither do men put new wine into old bottles: else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved.

Mk 2:22 And no man putteth new wine into old bottles: else the new wine doth burst the bottles, and the wine is spilled, and the bottles will be marred: but new wine must be put into new bottles.

Lk 5:37-39 And no man putteth new wine into old bottles; else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish. But new wine must be put into new bottles; and both are preserved. No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new: for he saith, The old is better.

The wine-skin was usually made of the skin of a goat or sheep. It was removed from the animal, tanned, the hair cut close then turned inside-out. The neck opening became the mouth of the “bottle”, and the feet and tail openings were closed with cords. An old skin would burst when new, still-fermenting wine was poured in since the wine would expand. New skin would be sufficiently elastic enough to stretch under the pressure. **“Bottles:** askous; literally *wine-skins*, though our word *bottle* originally carried the true meaning, being a bottle of *leather*. In Spanish, *bota* means *leather bottle*, a *boot*, and a *butt*. In Spain wine is still brought to market in pig-skins. In the East, goat-skins are commonly used, with the rough side inward. When old, they break under the fermentation of the wine.” [Vincent, *Word Studies*]

“Two complaints were raised against Jesus: *First*. His negligence of the legal forms; to this accusation He has just replied. *Second*. His contempt for the representatives of legalism, and His sympathy with those who had thrown off the theocratic discipline. It is to this second charge that He now replies. Nothing can be more simple than our parable from this point of view. **The new wine represents that living and healthy spirituality which flows so abundantly through the teaching of Jesus; and the bottles, the men who are to become the depositories of this principle, and to preserve it for mankind.** And whom in Israel will Jesus choose to fulfil this part? The old practitioners of legal observance? Pharisees puffed up with the idea of their own merit? Rabbis jaded with textual discussions? Such persons have nothing to learn, nothing to receive from Him! If associated with His work, they

could not fail to falsify it, mixing up with His instructions the old prejudices with which they are imbued; or even if they should yield their hearts for a moment to the lofty thought of Jesus, it would put all their religious notions and routine devotion to the rout, just as new and sparkling wine bursts a worn-out leathern bottle. **Where, then, shall He choose His future instruments? Among those who have neither merit nor wisdom of their own....** ‘God, I thank Thee, because Thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to these babes’ (Luke 10:21). These babes will save the truth, and it will save them; this is expressed by these last words: ‘and both, the wine and the bottles, are preserved.’ “ [Godet, *Luke*]

Luke adds a comment omitted by both Matthew and Mark: that of the old is more desirous than the new. “The old wine, among the rabbins, was the wine of three leaves; that is, wine three years old; because, from the time that the vine had produced that wine, it had put forth its leaves three times.” [Clarke, *Commentary*] Following in the thoughts of the parable, the sense is that this conversion from the old to the new is not an immediate, easy task. “They must remember that it is not easy to pass from a system, with which one has been identified from childhood, to an entirely different principle of life. Such men must be allowed time to familiarize themselves with the new principle that is presented to them; and we must beware how we turn our backs upon them, if they do not answer, as Levi the publican did, to the first call. **The conversion of a publican may be sudden as lightning, but that of a scrupulous observer of the law will, as a rule, be a work of prolonged effort....** The new wine, however superior may be its quality, owing to its sharper flavor, is always repugnant to the palate of a man accustomed to wine, the roughness of which has been softened by age. In the same way, **it is natural that those who have long rested in the works of the law, should at first take alarm — Jesus can well understand it — at the principle of pure spirituality.**” [Godet, *Luke*] Several lessons may be derived from this additional comment:

- one lesson is that new Christians are “babes in Christ” and while there is a new life which makes a marked difference between the old, there is still the need for growth. “Christian prudence requires that the weak, and newly converted, should be managed with care and tenderness. To impose such duties and mortifications as are not absolutely necessary to salvation, before God has properly prepared the heart by his grace for them, is a conduct as absurd and ruinous as putting a piece of raw, unscoured cloth on an old garment; it is, in a word, requiring the person to do the work of a man, while as yet he is but a little child. Preachers of the Gospel, and especially those who are instruments in God’s hand of many conversions, have need of much heavenly wisdom, that they may know to watch over, guide, and advise those who are brought to a sense of their sin and danger. How many auspicious beginnings have been ruined by men’s proceeding too hastily, endeavoring to make their own designs take place, and to have the honor of that success themselves which is due only to God.” [Clarke, *Commentary*]
- even with sanctifying growth, some remnants of our old life never entirely disappear. What Christian, regardless of the length of time saved, does not from time to time think God “owes” them something for their devotion? While knowing it is not scriptural, how many Christians mentally keep a balance sheet of our “works”? What Christian, upon having repented from a sin, immediately has not thought that something has to be done on his part as a type of penance (although we as Baptists shudder at the very word) instead of resting on the finished work of Christ on the cross, believing God has fully forgiven him not for his sake but for the sake of Christ? How many Christians make a vow to “bribe” the Lord to do something that they desire? What Christian has not had Satan come beside him during some trial and bring up every little sin, portraying God as a harsh taskmaster punishing us for not towing the line? **It is amazing how we as believers speak so much of grace and live so much under a ‘works’ mentality.**

Clarke makes notice of the Lord’s balance in His approach to people: “The conduct as well as the preaching of our Lord is highly edifying. His manner of teaching made every thing He spoke interesting and impressive. He had many prejudices to remove, and He used admirable address in order to meet and take them out of the way. There is as much to be observed in the manner of speaking the truth, as in the truth itself, in order to make it effectual to the salvation of them who hear it. **A harsh, unfeeling method of preaching the promises of the Gospel, and a smiling manner of producing the terrors of the Lord, are equally reprehensible.** Some preachers are always severe and magisterial: others are always mild and insinuating: neither of these can do God’s work; and it would take two such to make one PREACHER.” [Clarke, *Commentary*]

A final side note regarding wine: the implication of the parable is that wine commonly used for drinking was alcoholic in nature. Unless natural grape juice would have the expansion qualities necessary to have this parable make sense, this is a good proof-text that common drinking wine was alcoholic. If it was however, as mentioned in lesson 23, the practice of the day was to dilute it to render it non-effective.