

(New Wine in New Wineskins) 1. New Wineskins

by Zac Poonen

Zac Poonen's sermon emphasizes the necessity of breaking self to receive the new wine of Jesus' life within the framework of a new wineskin, free from religious traditions.

Scripture: Exodus 4:10, Job 40:4, Proverbs 4:18, Isaiah 6:5, Isaiah 30:15, Daniel 10:8, Luke 5:37, 2 Corinthians 3:18, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Revelation 1:17

Topics: "Spiritual Renewal", "Brokenness And Humility"

Description

Zac Poonen preaches on the significance of new wine being put into new wineskins, symbolizing the life of Jesus in the church He builds. He emphasizes the need to wait on God, allowing our strength and self-efforts to come to an end so that God's power can manifest in our weakness. Poonen highlights the importance of brokenness, humility, and self-judgment in experiencing the new wine of Jesus' life and the new covenant blessings. He challenges believers to break free from religious traditions that hinder the work of God and to embrace God's ways in building the body of Christ.

Transcript

Jesus spoke about new wine being put into new wineskins (Luke 5:37). The new wine is the life of Jesus and the new wineskin is the church that Jesus builds.

The New Wine

At the marriage in Cana, where Jesus was present, the old wine ran out. The old wine was made with human effort, over a period of many years - but it could not meet the need. This is a parable of life under the law - the old covenant. The old wine runs out; and the Lord has to wait until it runs out before He can give us the new wine. "For the Lord God says: Only in waiting for Me will you be saved.but you say, We will get our help from Egypt (human strength)! So you will be chased by your enemies.And the Lord is waiting for you (to come to an end of yourself) and to come to Him, so that He can show you His love; He will conquer you to bless you.Blessed are all those who wait for Him to help them" (Isaiah 30:15-18 - TLB).

When we have tried and tried and tried to live in victory and failed repeatedly, this is the lesson that God is trying to teach us: "You cannot have victory in your own strength." As long as you are under the law, you

will be ruled by sin. The chief work that God seeks to do in each of His children is to break down the strength of self totally. Jesus waited for the old wine to run out, at Cana, before He did His miracle. He is waiting now for our strength to come to an end. All our failures and defeats are meant by God to bring us to the end, for He can manifest His power perfectly only in our weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). We can see the strength of self in the moments of temptation and provocation, when we react with bitter words, angry expressions, self-justification, criticism and judgment of others, unforgiving attitudes, a grabbing-love for material things, fighting for our rights and our reputation, seeking vengeance etc. These and other similar attitudes show how strong self still is in us - the old wine has not yet run out; and Jesus waits on the sidelines doing nothing for us.

If only we allow God to break us, if only we would humble ourselves and gladly accept death to our rights and reputation, how quickly He could lead us into life under the new covenant! All the trying circumstances, frustrations and disappointments, heartaches etc., that we go through are meant by God to bring the strength of our self down to zero.

This was how God dealt with Job. Finally Job reached that zero-point where lying on his face in the dust, he said, "Lord, I am nothing. (I am zero.)I lay my hand upon my mouth in silence.I had only heard about you (second-hand) before, but now I have seen you and I loathe myself and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 40:4; 42:5, 6).

This is what happens when God has finally broken us and given us a revelation of Himself. The same Moses, who once thought himself to be so capable (at the age of 40), when broken by the vision of God (40 years later) says, "Lord, I can't speak. Send someone else" (Exodus 4:10, 13).

The same thing happened to the great prophet Isaiah when he saw God's glory. He said, "My doom is sealed, for I am a foul-mouthed sinner" (Isaiah 6:5). Daniel says that when he saw the vision the Lord gave Him, that his strength left him. He came to a zero-point (Daniel 10:8).

When the Spirit-filled apostle John, after having walked with God for 65 years, saw Jesus on the isle of Patmos, he fell at His feet as a dead man (Revelation 1:17).

Such has always been the experience of all who have seen the glory of the Lord! Their face is in the dust and their mouth is shut.

When God can bring us to that place, it is but a quick task for Him to give us the new wine, the life of Jesus, the divine nature, the pre-eminent blessing of the new covenant sealed through the blood of Jesus.

Oh that we might all come there quickly and live in that place - with our face in the dust before God - all our days! For there is a development in this life from light to light (Proverbs 4:18), from glory to glory (2 Corinthians 3:18).

John speaks of "Walking in the light" (1 John 1:7). There is no standing in the light, but rather a walking - a progression closer and closer to Him in whom there is no darkness at all. Thus the light shines brighter and brighter upon us and we become more and more conscious of the hidden sins that lurk in our flesh, which we were not aware of in earlier days; and the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all those sins.

Thus it is, that the closer we come to the Lord, the more aware we become of sin in our own flesh, and less and less of the sin in others around us. We no longer desire to throw stones at the woman caught in adultery, for we are aware in Jesus' presence, of the sin in our own flesh, and we cry out, "O wretched

man that I am", rather than "O wretched woman that she is" (Romans 7:24). Adam pointed a finger at his wife, even while standing before God (Genesis 3:12). But the Lord made him aware of his own sin (3:17). This is what the Lord will do for us too. And this is really the test of whether we have just a religion and some doctrines or whether we are living before the face of God Himself.

Has the wine run out in our personal life, our married life or our assembly life? Then it is about time that we sought the Lord's face and acknowledged our need honestly. He alone can give us the new wine! The new wine in Cana was not produced by human effort. It was the supernatural work of God. So too can it be in our life. He will write His laws in our heart and mind, making us to will and to do His perfect will (Hebrews 8:10; Philippians 2:13). He will circumcise our hearts to love Him and cause us to walk in His commandments (Deuteronomy 30:6; Ezekiel 36:27). This will be as much His work as the new wine produced in Cana was His work. This is the meaning of grace. We cannot produce the life of Jesus - even if we try for a lifetime. But if we bear in our body "the dying of Jesus" (the taking up of the cross each day, the dying to our ego, our self-will and our rights and reputation), God promises to produce the new wine of the life of Jesus in us (2 Corinthians 4:10).

We are to run this race looking unto Jesus, comparing ourselves with Him alone, all the time. Thus alone will there be a constant cry from our hearts, "O wretched man that I am" - for we shall be constantly aware of how unlike Jesus we are, even when we have come to a life of victory over conscious sin. "Those who compare themselves with other believers are spiritual idiots" (2 Corinthians 10:12) for that is the surest way to spiritual pride and a hundred-and-one other evils. We can never be in danger of spiritual pride as long as our eyes are fixed on Jesus and we compare ourselves with Him constantly. The Holy Spirit shows us the glory of Jesus in the mirror of God's word and then only can He conform us to that likeness (2 Corinthians 3:18). Paul said that he had only one goal that he pressed on towards - not the conversion of the lost, but "the upward call of God (to become like) Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13, 14). And then he said, "Let us who are perfect (in our conscience, living in victory over conscious sin) have this same attitude (of pressing on towards total perfection, total likeness to Jesus)" (Philippians 3:15). This is the mark of the spiritually mature Christian. Service for God, evangelism etc., - all take a secondary place to this goal, in the life of the mature man of God.

John also tells us that it is through such a walking in the light of God that we can have fellowship with one another (1 John 1:7) - not only fellowship with God, but also fellowship with other believers in perfect unity. The reason for this is very simple. The one who is walking in the light of God, living before God's face, will always be aware of his own shortcomings and will be living in a constant self-judgment, and will not have anything to accuse other brothers of. Thus there can never be any strife between any two brothers who are walking in this pathway. This is the narrow way to life that, Jesus said, few find (Matthew 7:14). Judgment begins at the house of God even for the righteous, because in God's house, God dwells in unapproachable light (1 Peter 4:17, 18; 1 Timothy 6:6). "Who can live with the consuming fire?He who walks righteously (facing up to the truth concerning himself)" (Isaiah 33:14, 15).

This was the sin of the leader in the church at Laodicea that he did not live in this constant self-judgment (and it is easy to slip into that error when you become a leader) and thus did not know that he was 'wretched' (Revelation 3:17).

May we so live before God's face all our days, so that we live in constant brokenness and constant self-judgment crying out "O wretched man that I am". Thus even when we reach the heights of holiness that a saved sinner can reach on earth, we shall still say (sincerely and honestly, without any false

humility) "I am the very least of all the believers.I am the chief of sinners" (Ephesians 3:8; 1 Timothy 1:15). Thus we shall have a fellowship with other believers who walk the same way and gradually our mutual fellowship will become more and more like the fellowship that the Father and the Son have with each other (John 17:21). This is the new wine Jesus desires to give us.

The New Wineskin

Many who would have rejoiced in the message thus far, may not now be willing to pay the price to have the new wineskin as well. But Jesus said, "New wine must be put into new wineskins" (Luke 5:38). And here is where our obedience is tested.

In acquiring the new wine, our battle is against sin. But in acquiring the new wineskin, our battle is against religious traditions that have annulled the word of God. And it is far more difficult for many to break free from the traditions of men than it is for them to break free from sin! But, men of violence alone will possess the kingdom of God (Matthew 11:12). Religious traditions cannot be removed apart from violent treatment.

Jesus was crucified not because He preached against sin, but because He preached against religious traditions that had replaced God's word among the Jews (Mark 7:1-13). He exposed the hypocrisy of religious leaders, the emptiness of their religious traditions and turned out of the temple those who made money in the name of religion. His zeal to purify God's house was what infuriated the religious leaders to ask for His crucifixion.

It is unlikely that people will demand our crucifixion, for preaching a message of 'brokenness' and the new wine. But if you are determined to go on and proclaim the whole counsel of God that the new wine must now be put into new wineskins, you can expect the wrath of the religious hierarchy in every single denomination that there is in Christendom.

Why did Jesus say that the new wine could not be put into the old wineskin? Because the old wineskin could not stretch any more, and so would burst. The old wineskin was once useful - to put the old wine in - but it is of no use for the new wine.

The Jewish religious system - the old wineskin - was once ordained by God through Moses to contain the old wine. But once Jesus had come and established a new covenant, a new wineskin was needed. The old had to go. Jesus said that the old could not even be modified with the new patched on to it! That would tear the garment (Luke 5:36).

We may think that, being Christians, we have got rid of the old Jewish wineskin and that we have a new wineskin in the Christian church. But if you look carefully at what you call your Christian assembly, you may be surprised to find a number of old-covenant characteristics in it.

Consider just three examples, although there are many others.

First of all, the Jews had a special tribe (the Levites) who were priests who did all the religious work. Not all Jews could be priests. Under the new covenant however, all believers are priests (1 Peter 2:5; Revelation 1:6). Although this is a truth held theoretically by most believers, it is actually practised by very few. Almost every group of Christians has their 'priest' or 'pastor' or 'God's servant' or 'full-time worker' who are exactly like the Levites of old, leading the worship of God's people. Only these 'Levites' can baptise new converts and break bread. And these 'Levites' are supported by the tithes of God's people. In the meetings, these 'Levites' dominate the show, giving no opportunity for a 'body'-ministry. A one-speaker

show is part of the old wineskin. Under the new covenant, every believer can drink of the new wine, be anointed with the Holy Spirit and have the gifts of the Spirit. Two or three prophets are to begin the meeting, one or two may speak in tongues (with an interpretation for each) and every believer is free to prophesy in the meeting and build up the church. This is the new wineskin (1 Corinthians 14:26-31). The new wine is described in 1 Corinthians 13 - the life of love. The new wineskin is described in 1 Corinthians 12 & 14. But how many believers want things done God's way? Alas, very few. Most are content with their old wineskin, and their paid 'Levites'.

Secondly, the Jews had their prophets who found God's will for them in various matters - since the prophets alone had the Spirit. But under the new covenant, the prophets have quite a different function - to build up the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11, 12). Since all believers can now receive the Holy Spirit, they do not have to go to some prophet to find out God's will for them (Hebrews 8:11; 1 John 2:27). Yet many believers are still living in the old wineskin of going to some man of God to find out what they should do, whom they should marry, etc.

Thirdly, the Jews were a large community of people scattered over a wide area but having a central headquarters in Jerusalem and having an earthly High Priest as their leader. Under the new covenant, Jesus alone is our High Priest and the only headquarters we have is the throne of God. The Jews had a lampstand with seven branches branching out of the central stem (Exodus 25:31, 32). This was the old wineskin.

Under the new covenant, each local church is a separate lampstand - with no branches. You see this clearly in Revelation 1:12, 20, where the seven local churches in Asia Minor are represented by seven separate lampstands - unlike the Jewish lampstand. Jesus, as the Head of the churches, walks amidst those lampstands. There was no earthly pope, or general superintendent or president of any denomination in those days. There was no chief elder brother anywhere on earth either, who was the final voice in any matter. Each local church was governed by local elders. These elders were directly responsible to the Lord as their Head. But we see multitudes of Christians around us today who are in a denominational system (the old wineskin), whether with or without a name - for there are some groups who claim not to be a denomination but who nevertheless have all the characteristics of a denomination. All this is the old wineskin.

God has ordained the new wineskin of the local church to prevent the spread of corruption. If the seven churches of Asia Minor had all been branches of one another, then the corrupt doctrines of Balaam and the Nicolaitans and the false prophecies of Jezebel (Revelation 2:14, 15 & 20) would have spread to all the seven churches. But since they were all separate lampstands, two churches in Smyrna and Philadelphia, could keep themselves pure. Get rid then, of the old wineskin of denominationalism, if you want to keep your assembly pure.

May the Lord raise up many in our land who are willing to do violence to the traditions of men (Matthew 11:12) that have held so many in bondage; and who will build the body of Christ in each locality.

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