

New Bottles

#0324

Study Given by W. D. Frazee April 6, 1973

Our text this evening is found in Mark 2:22—the words of Jesus. I'm so glad that the Holy Spirit inspired four different men to write the story of our Savior's life, aren't you? And each one gave us a little different picture, like four sides of a building, giving us a much broader view of what Jesus taught and the different experiences of His life. Mark 2:22—one of Jesus' parables:

“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” Mark 2:22.

We'll understand Christ's words better when we recall what kind of bottles He was talking about. They weren't glass bottles. It may sound strange to some of us, but they were using skins of animals. Wineskin, they were called. They would take the skin of an animal and tie off where the legs were and use where the head had been cut off for the mouth of the bottle. And, of course, it was cleaned out, but it was these skins of animals that were used to hold the wine.

As time went on, these wineskins, or bottles as they're called here, would become dry and brittle so that they couldn't be used time after time like we use glass bottles. You know, we put up fruit in glass jars and the glass jars are just as good this year as they were last year or 10 years ago, aren't they? So we might wonder what's the matter here. Well, you understand it when you think of these skins of animals, these leather bottles, so to speak.

Now, a word on this expression, “The new wine.” You see, when wine is freshly pressed from the grapes, it is, of course, without any fermentation. But as it sits, and whether it's lying in a vat or whether it's in a wineskin—in one of these bottles—it begins to do what? Ferment. Now you might wonder why Jesus used this illustration, for He's speaking of His doctrine, His teaching.

Usually, you and I think of fermentation as an illustration and example of what? Sin, and this is correct. We have a similar double-use of a similar illustration in the use of leaven. You'd remember that the Jews were required to purge out of their houses all leaven when what feast came? Passover—feast of unleavened bread. And Paul, picking up the figures, says:

“Purge out the old leaven... for even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us” 1 Corinthians 5:7.

Leaven is a symbol of sin. But in Christ's parables in Matthew 13, He said:

“The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened” Matthew 13:33.

So, leaven can be a figure of sin on the one hand, or the working of God’s principles on the other. And it’s a very apt figure in either case. Truth has moving power, and so does error. God is at work in the hearts of men, and so is Satan.

This leaven, which works in meal, in flour, and causes the bread to rise; we have a similar process in the fermentation that takes place in the grape juice. And while, as I say, it’s often used as a symbol of sin, here Christ is using it to represent the power, the moving, the expanding power of His principles.

Now with those thoughts before us, let’s read the text again. Will you read it with me?

“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” Mark 2:22.

You see, a fresh wineskin had a certain amount of elasticity to it. And as the pressure built up there, because of the fermentation, that fresh wineskin could take it. But an old wineskin, brittle—what would happen? What did Jesus say would happen? It would burst!

What was Jesus dealing with here? The Pharisees, as they often did, had been criticizing. They didn’t like it because Jesus was attending the feast of Levi Matthew, the publican, who had just accepted an appointment with Him. He’d left government service and had entered the service of Jesus. Quite a difference in wages involved. But Matthew was so happy over this appointment with the Savior that he gave a feast to celebrate his leaving government service and entering into the service of Jesus. But the Pharisees criticized Jesus for paying any attention to Matthew.

What was the matter with Matthew? He was a Publican. The Pharisees didn’t like that. And so they said:

“This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them”
Luke 15:2.

They criticized Him. Then they sought to criticize Jesus to the disciples of John. (You can read the story here in Mark 2.) John had been a rather strict preacher, and strict in his living. He was on the austere side. He practiced fasting, apparently from this chapter, and his disciples shared with him in this. From time to time, they would fast. And of course, the Pharisees had their fast days, too. But here was Jesus having a what? A feast, instead of a fast. And they said, Well, the very idea! And so they tried to sow discord. They tried to awaken doubts in the minds of John’s disciples. Now, they had no real appreciation of John the Baptist in his work. They had not rallied to his message when he was preaching there at the

Jordan. But now they saw an opportunity to try to create schism—division. Who does that kind of work, anyway? Who's behind it? The devil is. So, here he was at work. And so they suggested to John's disciples that Jesus wasn't doing things the way John did. A number of Jesus' disciples had been John's disciples, and so the Pharisees tried to sow doubt in *their* minds. They said, Now, how is it that John and his disciples fast often, and you and your Master, you don't do that way? What's the matter? Criticism, you see, doubts.

But remember, they were about religious duties. The Pharisees were, shall I say, punctilios. They were very careful to get everything right, down to the dotting of an I and the crossing of the T. But, many of them, their hearts were far from mercy and the love of God.

Now you get the picture, all these criticisms, and faultfindings, and questions, and doubts. And how does Jesus meet it? He says, "Listen, you cannot put new wine in old bottles." The old bottles were the maxims and traditions, and attitudes of the scribes and Pharisees. Hoary with age, their traditions were dry and brittle. They were fixed in their concepts, very rigid. If a person departed, in the least, from the little details of the way they had arranged things, then that man was "outside." He didn't belong with them. Jesus said that that attitude is like the old wineskins. But oh, He is saying, "My teaching that God has given Me to bring is like new wine; and it will work and move in the hearts of those who accept it and burst these old, dry, brittle, rigid concepts."

Is that what the Gospel of Jesus did back there in the first century? Did it? Oh, it did break! It just broke everything up. You'd remember that in one city where Paul and his company came, the cry of opposition was raised, "These men that have turned the world upside down are come hither." Well, they did. There was power in that—the power of the Holy Spirit, the power of heaven. And there was no way, mark the point, to take those old, dried up, leather bottles of age-old religion, with their horrid tradition, there was no way to take that framework and use it.

Christ would have been glad to use the individuals that made up that organization. He appealed to Nicodemus, and Nicodemus finally accepted Him, but at the price of his position in the establishment. He got hold of Paul, but oh my, it cost Paul a loss of all that he had, didn't it? Yes. I repeat, Christ would have been glad to take the leaders of the Jewish nation and the Jewish church and use them as His ambassadors. But they were so fixed, so rigid in their attitudes and ideas, that they saw in the work of God Himself, in Christ, simply opportunities to criticize and find fault.

So, Jesus had to take His message to the fishermen, to the Publicans. Now and then, He got a Pharisee like Nicodemus. But in general, it was from the common people who heard Him gladly that His followers came. Could I repeat, within the short space of one generation, the power of God, working in and through those disciples, burst things asunder, and a new movement was carrying a new message to the whole world, and finding honest hearts everywhere, ready to receive the Gospel that those men carried?

We come down some centuries later, and we see that that very church that Christ had established had in its turn, as the Jewish church, become occupied with forms and ceremonies. The Spirit had been lost. The great commands that God had given were covered up with a mass of rubbish of human tradition. As the day drew near for a true reformation to take place, God raised up Luther, He raised up Calvin, and Knox, and other reformers. What for? In order that the message of God might go unhindered and unhampered.

A number of those reformers, you remember, for a time sought to work things out within the structure that they had been brought up in. Luther had no thought of separation from Rome. He was an earnest member of the established church. He had no other thought than to try to improve it. But, my friends, the Word of God was fulfilled. New wine must be put into new bottles. And so, God led Luther and Calvin and the other reformers to lead out in a great new movement, restoring the Bible to the people, teaching the simple and wonderful and beautiful truths of righteousness by faith, justification through believing in the blood of Jesus.

But the time passed on, and those churches became like the mother church from which they had separated—rigid, formal, dead. And God had to take a simple-hearted but studious farmer, up there in New York State, and lead his mind to the study of the prophecies. Within a few years, William Miller was heralding the Advent message all through the various churches of that time. And from 1831 to 1844, church after church, city after city, section after section was reached with the great Advent message, focusing on the time when Jesus was to return.

But what happened? Could the old bottles take the new wine? No. New wine must be put into new bottles. And so, within those brief years from 1840 to 1844, and the great disappointment, and the experiences that came in the next 10 years afterward, God put the new wine of the great three-fold message into new bottles. And thank God, for over 100 years, now, that message has been going out to the ends of the earth.

Now, with that brief survey and background, I want to, with the help of the Holy Spirit, study with you what it means to us personally. For, my dear friends, movements, organizations are made up of people. The nation that rejected Jesus and nailed Him to the cross was made up of people. The great church that rejected the message of Luther and that burned and tortured thousands of his followers—that was made up of people. The organizations that rejected the message of William Miller and Joseph Bates and James White—those organizations were made up of people.

You and I are people. I ask you, friends, how are our concepts? What is our attitude? Are we able to expand with expanding truth, or are our ideas so fixed, so rigid, so formal that God must set us aside individually because we cannot keep up with His providence? I put it to you personally, what is your attitude? Perhaps I could word it in this way, Can we change our minds? I'm not talking about setting aside truth. That isn't the point at all. I'm talking about being willing to change our human ideas in order to accept light that God wants to shed upon our pathway.

You remember in 1888, in Minneapolis, there was a conference there, where the Lord brought new light, or as the servant of God put it, old light in a new setting. New wine, if you please. And what was the result? It began to stir, and pressures were created. And there were some whose minds were so rigid that they were like the old bottles that burst under the pressure. There were some, thank God, who were able to expand with that which God was pouring in.

And so, as we approach the great crisis of this movement in the coming latter rain and loud cry, we are told that there will be some, right within the movement, who will criticize the work of the Holy Spirit and call it fanaticism. There will be some, we are told, who will want to dictate and tell just exactly how everything shall be done when the angel of Revelation 18 comes down to direct the work. (You can read that in *Testimonies to Ministers*, page 300.)

My point is, God has in His church, today, leaders who are calling for revival and reformation. Scarcely a week goes by, but what in the *Review and Herald* we hear that call, now from our General Conference president, now from the editor of the *Review*, now from other leaders, now from laymen, writing in the letters to the editor's column. But, sorry to say, we see within the movement evidence that there are some who want to cling to the worldly concepts, who are not willing to advance in true revival and reformation. They argue for this, and that, and the other thing. You see that reflected, also, in some of those letters to the editor. Thus, the fermentation process, if you please, is taking place before our eyes. The new wine is at work. Pressures are being created. The straight testimony is being given. Some cannot bear it and rise up against it, and this is what will cause a what? A shaking among God's people (*Early Writings*, page 270).

I ask you, my brother, what will happen in your life? Are you an old, brittle bottle that's going to burst under the pressure? Or would you ask God to make you a new bottle that can hold the new wine? Thank God, there's something in this that is beyond the parable, beyond the illustration. If you read the comment on this in *Desire of Ages*, you'll find that God promises that if His people are willing, by His grace, He will make them new bottles into which He can put the new wine with safety. This is what I want tonight, friends: I want to be a new bottle. I want every bit of human obstinacy—stubbornness, rigidity, or just human opinion—I want to be limbered up from all that. What do you say? Thank God, there is power in the Gospel to do this.

You know, in the Laodicean message, we are told that our great need, in our poverty, is to get some, what? Gold. Are there some nations that would like to find some gold today? Oh yes! But this gold that Jesus is inviting you and me to get hold of is the gold of faith and love. Faith and love will deliver us from the rigidity of formalism. Faith and love will prepare us to not only accept but to *do* all that God has planned for His people to do in this closing hour. The True Witness says, "I want you to get some gold. I want you to have some faith and love."

Now friends, there is something peculiar about this movement, which is a great sign of faith and love. You know what it is? It's the seventh-day Sabbath, the Sabbath of the Fourth Commandment. As we trace down through the Ten Commandments, we find that most of them appeal to reason. Take, for instance,

the commandments in the last table. The command to obey parents, not to kill or commit adultery, or lie or steal or covet. Unless people are way gone in the devil's deceptions, most men will agree that those are reasonable. Most men will agree that life ought to be sacred, that the home ought to be respected, that property ought to be respected, that truth ought to be admired and upheld. Even in the first table, most people, if they have any idea of religion at all, will agree that God ought to be first and that images are foolish and senseless objects before which to bow down. And that swearing is not only a foolish thing but an irreverent thing. But when we come to the Fourth Commandment, the seventh-day Sabbath, we are dealing with something which needs divine revelation, on the one hand, to let us know about it, and it needs an attitude of faith on our part to believe it and to obey it.

A man might be an atheist and teach and practice much of the Ten Commandments. But it takes faith in God as the Creator to rest and worship on the seventh day. We do that, not because of human reason; we do it because of divine revelation, and our faith in it. And so, the seventh-day Sabbath is a sign, a special sign, of faith in what Jesus says. It is so today and will be so more and more as we go into the closing conflict. But it is no less a sign of love, for Jesus says:

“If ye love me, keep my commandments” John 14:15.

Again, I point to the tables of the Decalogue, and I point out that a man might refrain from killing or committing adultery or lying or stealing merely through self-respect, or his attitude toward others, or his sense that society needs the safeguards therein set up. But to keep the Sabbath is an expression of love for Jesus. Especially when all the world is doing anything and everything but that. Thus, the Sabbath becomes a sign of faith in what Jesus says, a sign of love for Him enough to do it.

I want to share with you an experience that took place over in one of the countries of Europe. There was a young man that was employed in a large factory over there. He was about 22 years of age, and he lived with his wife and three children in a comfortable home, which they owned. But the manager of the factory belonged to another religion, and he became very much prejudiced against this young man that kept the Sabbath. He made it as hard for him as he could—mistreated him, and persecuted him, and finally dismissed him—he fired him. But he was so bitter, the manager was, that he sent a letter to every factory throughout that area, where he thought the young man might go to find employment, and warned them against this young man so that they wouldn't hire him.

And so, day after day, this young man went looking for work where he could keep the Sabbath, but this letter had gone ahead. For 18 months, he kept looking for work. For 18 months, he watched his savings dwindle, and finally, the last bit of food in the house was gone, and there he was with his wife and three little children. This young man felt desperate.

In the anguish of his heart, he finally said to his wife, “Well, wife, do you think that maybe I ought to work on the Sabbath for your sake and the sake of the children?”

And that noble young woman said, "To obey is better than sacrifice, and I would rather die with you and the children than have you disobey God."

Then that young woman suggested to her husband that they kneel down and pray together, and remind God of His promises, and ask God to give them faith and courage. Ask God to help them to be true to Him no matter what it would cost. And so, as they knelt there in the poor little room that they had now been occupying (they had to move their home in the endeavor to buy bread), so kneeling there in that one little room with their three little children, they poured out their heart to God. In that prayer, the young man prayed for the factory manager that had caused him all this trouble. He asked God to forgive this man and in some way to lead him to Jesus.

As they were kneeling there in prayer, they didn't notice that the door was ajar. When they rose, they saw that a man was standing just inside the door. It was this factory manager, and as he began to speak, his tears flowed down his cheeks.

He said, "My friend, I've injured you grievously. I've sinned, not only against you but against God. And today, I couldn't have any peace of mind. (Who was burdening him? You know, the Holy Spirit.) I felt that I must come and seek you out and ask you for your forgiveness. I'm sorry for the way I've wronged you."

And so he took him back, put him in the factory, and paid him for all the time that he'd been without work. The best part of it is that finally, after a number of months, that young man had the joy of seeing this factory superintendent baptized into the message. Now he's keeping the Sabbath with him.

Oh my friend, that's the power of the new wine in the new bottle. That's the power of faith and love. This is the demonstration that is yet to be made in every life, and the Sabbath will be the great sign of it. When those who honor the Decalogue cannot buy or sell, when economic pressure combines with the threat of imprisonment and death, it will mean something to have so much faith in Jesus and so much love *for* Jesus that nothing can move us.

Has the new wine come flowing into your heart and life? Has God helped you to lay aside traditions and human concepts, not merely about what day to keep, but about everything in life? Have you yielded yourself to the Divine moving, that in Sabbath observance, the use of time, the use of money, God's principles shall be worked out? That in diet and dress, in reading and music, in recreation and amusements, in education and everything in life, what Jesus says shall be the basis of your faith, and what Jesus asks shall cause His love in you to respond to? This is the moving of the new wine.

May we bow our heads? Precious Lord, we thank Thee for the power of truth, living truth, inspired by Thee. We pray that it shall move upon all our hearts and that we may see the Blessed Jesus and receive Him fully, that He may make us new bottles in which the new wine shall have every opportunity to expand. We ask it for His sake. Amen.

[Testimony service follows]

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