

Text: Luke 5:31-39 (Pew Bible pg.1020)

Title: “God is Doing a New Thing”

INTRODUCTION

ILLUSTRATION – The recording artist Beyonce has had some important gigs lately. She will be the featured entertainment at the Super Bowl halftime show tonight ... hundreds of millions will see the show. But her performance will be a bit controversial, because of something that happened a week ago when she had the privilege of singing the National Anthem at the President Obama’s presidential inauguration in Washington D.C. Well, she didn’t actually *sing* the National Anthem live. It was revealed later that she lip-synced it to a recording she had made earlier. She later told reporters that she was a perfectionist and that she had been spending so much time rehearsing for the Super Bowl that she didn’t have time to properly prepare. She didn’t want to mess it up, so she lip-synced it. Now in fairness to Beyonce, lip-syncing for an outdoor event like the presidential inauguration isn’t uncommon, and she assured reporters that her show tonight at the Super Bowl will absolutely be live.

But as I watched that story unfold last week I couldn’t help but think how easy it is for us in the Christian life to give the impression that we are doing what we are doing from the heart, when really we’re just spiritually lip-syncing. The song of our life that we “sing” before others (our witness and our worship) isn’t *live*; it isn’t real ... we’re just pretending it is. And in times like that the Lord comes to challenge His people to live authentic lives before Him and before others.

Now what I have just done is to use a teaching tool that Jesus often used. Isn’t it great how stories like that can make truth come alive for us? Well along with being the Savior of the world, Jesus was a powerful teacher. And in that He often told great stories called “parables.” This morning I’m beginning an eight-week series on “The Life Stories of Jesus.” And to get started let’s turn to Luke 5:36. There are scores of life stories that Jesus told recorded for us in the Gospels. Some are lengthy; some are as short as a sentence. I’ve chosen eight parables from the Gospel of Luke. While the other Gospel writers were Jewish, Luke was a Gentile. He was a physician and his Gospel reflects a very orderly and systematic collection of details related to the life and teachings of Jesus. To get started just look at Luke 5:36.

Luke 5:36a - He told them this parable...

The word “parable” is a combination of two words that together mean “to set alongside” or “to throw alongside.” And Jesus, as He taught His followers and others would often throw in a life story so they could understand. He used parables to illustrate His teachings. They were stories that made the truth come to life. When Jesus threw in a life story, people said, “Oh, *now* I get it!” It’s like a sermon illustration. Many times it’s the stories or illustrations that we remember about a message, more than the actual points that are made.

Now take a look again at Luke 5:36. Read vv.36-39.

This parable is actually a two-part parable. On top of that it seems to summarize a couple of other images that Jesus uses in the preceding verses. So there are really four stories or images tied together here that drive home a single point that Jesus was making. And to understand what that point is we need to see the context.

All this happens in response to Jesus engaging spiritual and social outcasts. He calls a man named Matthew, a tax collector, to follow Him. And Matthew did. Tax collectors were a despised group. Upstanding Jews probably had “tax collector jokes” like some have “lawyer jokes” today. Now we know that that is an unfair caricature, but that’s the way they were viewed. Tax collectors were sympathetic to and partners with the occupying Roman army ... and the Jews despised them.

When Matthew comes to follow Christ, his life was immediately changed and he wanted to share Jesus with others. So he had a “Jesus party” at his house; he invited other tax collectors and “sinners” so they could meet Jesus. And a large number of these irreligious, spiritually bankrupt people came to the party and had the opportunity to meet Jesus.

By the way, that’s something that still works today. Your non-believing colleagues, classmates and friends may not just show up at church someday, but the statistics show that they are much more likely to come if you invite them. Guys, you’d be surprised how many of your friends would say “yes” if you invited them to the men’s Call of the Wild dinner in a few weeks. Ladies, you’d be surprised how many of your friends would say “yes” if you invited them to the Ladies Brunch in about a month.

So what’s going on inside Matthew’s house? Matthew has opened his home to these people who are far from God. And Jesus is there in the big middle of it all, enjoying the festivities like the rest. Jesus moved easily among people like this. He was not threatened by them. He loved them unconditionally. Now Jesus never lowers His standards, because we see in a moment that Jesus calls them to repent. But these religious low-lives and “sinners” were drawn to Jesus because He loved them. That’s what’s going on inside.

Look what’s going on outside. You would think that the Jewish people, and especially the leaders, would have been overjoyed that these people who are far from God are responding to Jesus. But the opposite is true.

Luke 5:30 - But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained...

The Pharisees were a religious sect among the Jews; think of them the equivalent of a spiritual political party. They were hyper- conservative, hyper-religious men who saw themselves as the guardians of the traditions of the Jewish faith. And they stand outside and complain (lit. “murmured”). Rather than rejoicing that these spiritual failures had taken a step in the right direction, the Pharisees could only point fingers and criticize because the traditional rules were being violated.

So here they are standing outside Matthew's house with their arms crossed and their eyes squinted and the lips clinched. The implication is that Jesus and his followers aren't as spiritual as they're supposed to be.

When I read passages like this I can't help but *see the Pharisee in me*. I'm afraid I'm like the Pharisees so often because of my attitude toward people who don't have their spiritual act together. And consequently, I miss out on so much of what Jesus is doing. These religious people were on the outside looking in on what Jesus was doing. I don't want to be there. I want to be in there with Jesus ... loving the way He loved, caring the way He cared. Would you pray today, "Lord, help me to see the Pharisee in me"?

If we don't understand this context, we won't understand the point of the images and parables that Jesus uses here. And for that to happen, we're going to have to see the radical difference between the practice of cold religion (like the Jewish leaders), and the amazing life of freedom that Jesus came to offer. The Kingdom of God that broke into this world when Jesus came on the scene operates on an entirely different level than cold, ritualistic religion.

So Jesus moves through a series of parables ... powerful life stories that drive home the difference Jesus came to make ... stories that hopefully will help me see that in Christ and in the Gospel, God is doing a new thing.

ILLUSTRATION – I was talking to a couple this past week; they were burdened about their spiritual life. They said, "Pastor, we don't want to just have a box-checking religious life." By that they meant that they wanted more than just to go through each week checking the boxes ... SMBS, check; worship service, check; offering, check; and so on.

The Kingdom of God that Jesus came to proclaim is so radically different than the "do your best" religion that was common in Jesus' day, and in ours as well. God is doing a new thing. And guess what?

1. IT'S FOR THE "SICK," NOT THE "WELL" (Luke 5:31-32)

In response to the criticism of the Pharisees that Jesus was hanging out with spiritual "low-lives"...

Luke 5:31-32 - Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

"Healthy" people don't think they need any help. It's only the sick who will seek help. So-called "righteous" people (at least in their own eyes) think they have no need of salvation. But sinners know their need and must repent.

It's interesting that Luke, the physician, picks up on this. As long as you won't admit you're sick, you won't go see the doctor. These tax collectors and "sinners" were humble enough to know they were spiritually sick, and they could experience the spiritual healing that Jesus could bring. The religious people thought they were spiritually well; they don't need help.

The healing that Jesus comes to bring will only be found by those who are humble enough to admit their utter sinfulness and spiritual failure. The Bible says there is none righteous, not even one! And the faithful preaching of the Gospel shows us all that we need Christ ... to save us, keep us saved, and to deliver us to heaven one day.

This new thing God is doing in Christ is for those who realize their spiritual sin-sickness and respond with humility. Then Jesus uses another image to show something else about this new thing God is doing:

2. IT'S ABOUT JOY, NOT GLOOM (Luke 5:33-35).

Now the religion of many in Jesus' time was a religion of gloom, not of joy. And that's what we see in the next verses.

Luke 5:33 - They said to him, "John's disciples often fast and pray, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours go on eating and drinking."

Luke 5:34 - Jesus answered, "Can you make the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them?"

Luke 5:35 - But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; in those days they will fast."

So Jesus doesn't fast enough, the Pharisees say? The Pharisees were very devout, and a couple of days a week they would fast. And many of them would draw attention to themselves with their sad faces ... like hanging a sign around their necks: "I'm looking a little weak today because I am fasting."

Now Jesus was not opposed to fasting. He taught it in other places, but the thing that Jesus was driving home in this life story is that the new life that He came to offer is filled with joy, not gloom. It's like a wedding, not a funeral. Stop to think about the difference in the mood of a funeral and the mood of a wedding. A funeral is quiet, somber and sedate. (At least most of them are.). A wedding is noisy, happy and celebrative.

The new thing that God is doing is as different as a wedding is to a funeral. And Jesus doesn't let up. He throws another story in here, further driving home the truth.

3. IT'S ABOUT EMBRACING THE NEW AND LETTING GO OF THE OLD (Luke 5:36).

Luke 5:36 - He told them this parable: "No one tears a patch from a new garment and sews it on an old one. If he does, he will have torn the new garment, and the patch from the new will not match the old."

ILLUSTRATION - When we get a hole in a pair of jeans, we either keep wearing them as a fashion statement (paying more for them than a pair without holes), or we throw them away. In ancient times, and even in the not so distant past, people put a patch over the hole in the garment. When I

was a boy I remember they had these iron-patches that my mom would put on the knees of my jeans when I wore a hole in them.

In biblical times when you got a hole in a piece of clothing, you would find an old garment that you didn't use anymore and you'd cut a piece of it and sew it as a patch on the hole in the other garment. No one would think of taking a new coat, cutting a piece out of it and sewing it onto an old coat, would they? Or would they? There is only one person who would do that: someone who cherished the old coat so much that they would ruin a new one in order to save the old.

Listen, Jesus didn't come to just patch up your old life ... to make you a little more religious. He came to give you an entirely new life. And to receive that new life you have to receive it by faith and let go of your old life.

So Jesus has thrown in three images or parables to drive home this truth that God is doing a new thing in Christ, and now He comes to the climax. This new thing God is doing ...

4. IT'S SOMETHING ALIVE, NOT DEAD (Luke 5:37-39).

Luke 5:37 - And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined.

Luke 5:38 - No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins.

And everyone knew exactly what Jesus was talking about. The life of Palestine in Jesus' day was most agricultural. Grapes were grown, picked and then crushed. The grape juice was collected in vats, then ultimately the poured into wineskins. Without grossing you out, a wineskin was an animal's skin that had all the innards removed, the openings were sewed up, and the grape juice was poured into this skin. Now the grape juice was "alive." It fermented, and as it did the gas was produced that caused the wineskin to expand. And the wineskin had to be flexible to allow for this. As the wine aged it stopped changing. The skin would dry out and harden, but that's OK. The wine was "dead" at that point. When the wine was consumed the old wineskin was tossed aside. It was hardened and stiff. It couldn't be used again to pour new wine in because it couldn't expand. The wineskin would burst and the wine would be spilled out.

God is doing a new thing in Christ. He came not just to give you a new schedule or new habits. In your sins you are spiritually dead. He came to give you life. You have to let go of the old in order to grasp the new thing God wants to do.

2 Corinthians 5:17 - Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

The new thing God is doing is something alive and dynamic, and it leads to freedom from sin and a "check-the-box" religion. It sets us free to live a new life in the Spirit of God.

John 8:32 - Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

John 8:36 - So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

2 Corinthians 3:17 - Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

But our sinful hearts want a do-it-yourself religion, just like the Pharisees of Jesus' day.

Luke 5:39 - And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for he says, 'The old is better.'
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Most scholars take see this is a chastisement of Jesus directed at the Pharisees and other religious leaders. They have become contented with the “old wine” of their “check-the-box” religion and they don't want the new thing God is doing. They callously say, “The old is better.”

Lord, help me to see the Pharisee in me.

So all this complaining about who Jesus should and should not eat with, and when and how often people should fast all grew out of this “check-the-box” mentality of the old religion. Is that what your life looks like ... a “check-the-box” religion? Won't you trade that today for the totally new life Jesus came to give you?

CONCLUSION

Jesus came to fulfill all the requirements of the Law for us. We cannot perfectly keep the Law, so we are condemned, no matter how hard we try to heal ourselves, pump ourselves up, patch up the old, or generate something in our lives. Jesus came to accomplish all of that for us. What is required of us is to repent and trust in Him.