**Good news**! You can now get a wonderful deal on this new car you’ve never heard of and you don’t need! We’ve all seen this kind of advert. The sort of advertising that’s trying to sell you things you don’t need or want. Yet that wants me to rest assured that it really is **good news**.

There’s another type of **good** **news**. **Good news**, says the letter from the Inland Revenue, we owe you a tax rebate. The money’s already in your account. That surely would be truly **good news** for anyone!

We’ve been following the early days of Jesus’ public ministry as recorded in Luke’s gospel. And we know that Jesus’ coming is **good news**. Back at Christmas we heard the angel tell the shepherds, “Do not be afraid. I bring you **good news** that will cause great joy for all the people” (2:10). When Jesus read from Isaiah in the previous chapter he’d said, “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he’s anointed me to proclaim **good news** to the poor” (4:18). After doing his first healings Jesus said, “I must proclaim the **good news** of the kingdom of God to the other town also, because that is why I was sent” (4:43).

The question is. What type of **good news** does Jesus bring? Is it the shiny type announcing things we don’t need or want? Or is it the real kind of **good news** that we both sorely need and desperately want.

This week we’re going to look at two reactions to Jesus’ **good news**. In verses twenty-seven to thirty-two we find people questioning whether they really need the repentance Jesus offers. And in thirty-three to thirty-nine, people challenge Jesus because their not willing to leave their old lives. Two important aspects of Jesus message: repentance and change of life. Is *that* **good news** for you?

*A New Beginning for Those Who Need It (vv. 27-32)*

In verse twenty-seven we meet a tax collector called Levi. As a tax collector he was employed by the state which, at the time, was a foreign occupying force. It was a job that was on the one hand very lucrative. It earned a lot of money. And on the other hand, made him an outcast from his countrymen.

Jesus said to him, “Follow me.” This wasn’t a “follow me” like saying, come over here for a second while I show you something. This follow me is a, “start a life of following me.” And Levi, “got up, left everything and followed him.” Or “began to follow him.”

All that Levi had was his job. A job that brought him wealth, but at the same time made him an enemy to many. If he follows Jesus, he’ll lose his job and he’ll still be an outcast. It’s a big move. He does it.

Back at Levi’s house Jesus has a dinner with Levi and some of his friends. The Pharisees were watching this and complain. How can Jesus be so carefree with his associates. Does he not know who he’s with? “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” They ask.

I don’t know what comes to mind for you when you hear the word ‘sinner’. Probably different things for different people. What it means here is someone who has failed to keep God’s law. God had given his people a covenant including how they were to be his people. A sinner was someone who failed to keep it. A righteous person was someone who kept it. A tax collector came in the category of sinner. So how could Jesus eat with them?

Because, says Jesus, the righteous don’t need help. Forgiveness of sins and restoration of relationship with God isn’t good news to someone who hasn’t sinned and who doesn’t need restoration. They’re already OK.

But I’ve come, says Jesus, for those who know they have sinned. They know they have fallen short, and they know it is good news to gain restored relationship with God.

As we approach this text. It’s easy for us to say, “How silly those Pharisees are! Of course, they’re sinners. Of course, they need the gospel.” But let’s pause and examine ourselves for a minute. Let me ask you this: how repentant are you for sin? How does sin make you feel? Do you see you have sin? Or do you find that confession leaves you wandering what to say? Do you sorrow for it? Or to you pass it off saying, “I’m forgiven, it’ll be alright.” Do you confess it? Do you feel the shame of sin? Do you hate sin? Ultimately, do you turn from sin?

These are the questions we ask and the way we feel if we are those who know we’re sick and need a doctor. If we know we’re sinners and we need repentance.

Between the 1930s and 1950s cigarretes were good for you. At least, that’s what was often said. There are adverts showing doctors announcing their preferred brand. Camel cigarretes famously had the slogan, “more doctors smoke Camels than any other cigarette.”

When once it was realized that cigarette’s weren’t good for you. It took a long time to change. By that time smoking was a habit. Some downplayed the dangers. Some argued they would give up soon. Others said they couldn’t give up because they were addicted.

Admission of the real dangers of smoking took acknowledging what it was. Admitting its dangers. Facing up to it and doing something about it. But many weren’t willing to take these steps.

Sin follows the same pattern. Jesus came to save the sick, not the healthy. The Pharisees thought they were fine. They smoked Camels. The doctors choice! They couldn’t see they had a problem. Levi saw he had a problem. He came to the doctor and was able to receive from Jesus the gift of repentance.

If we see sin and we cover it up. Excuse it. Play it down. Even defend it. We’re in with the Pharisees. Those who don’t see that Jesus came to call sinners to repentance. The question is, do you know you’re spiritually sick?

*A New Beginning Is a Break with the Old (vv. 33-39)*

Our first story, then, is about Jesus coming for those who know they need repentance. Our second story continues the theme, asking whether, having repented, we’re willing to leave the old behind for the new.

The scene opens with people asking Jesus why it is that John the Baptist’s disciples and the Pharisees and their disciples regularly fast, but Jesus’ disciples don’t. The question is about why Jesus’ doesn’t teach his disciples to follow the traditions and customs of their forefathers.

Whatever we might expect Jesus to reply, it probably isn’t what he actually replies. Verse thirty-four, “Can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while he is with them?” Fasting was often used in a period of mourning for sin. Do people mourn at weddings? No, of course not. Verse thirty-seven, “the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; in those days they will fast.”

What does this reply mean? Jesus is the bridegroom. He’s come to bring the people to himself. This picture is completed at the end of the Bible, in Revelation twenty-one, where we find the marriage of Christ to the Church. The people fasted in mourning because of the problem of sin.

One of the main fasts, for example, was Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. On that day there would be fasting and mourning for sin. Moreover, the prophets announced to the people that they had been unfaithful to their marriage covenant with God. And because of this unfaithfulness the relationship was broken. God’s people, then, were waiting for God to intervene to restore the relationship.

With all this in the background, Jesus’ calling himself the bridegroom means he’s announcing that in him is God’s restoration of relationship. That in him a new period of history begins. This period is the era of restoration, the year of the Lord’s favour. It isn’t an era of mourning but rejoicing.

“The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them” verse thirty-five. There will be a time of mourning when Jesus dies. But ultimately history has hinged. Everything has changed with his coming. It won’t work to act otherwise. To behave as if everything hasn’t changed.

I have the priviledge of going into school quite regularly. In some ways it feels very odd to walk around the corridors and stand at the front of assembly. It feels strange not only to know but to use the teachers’ first names! It’s a bit odd because it doesn’t feel that long ago that I was in school. I remember it so clearly.

But times have changed, and I don’t behave in school now as I did as a child. It’s completely different. Neither is it possible to be part schoolboy and part visiting minister because I’m not a schoolboy anymore!

This is what Jesus is getting at with the new period of the coming of the bridegroom. Everything’s changed. The period of preparation was good and necessary but it’s over because he’s here. It’s not possible to mix a little of the old and a little of the new. It’s a clean break.

Jesus’ first illustration to show this is in verse thirty-six, “No one tears a piece out of a new garment to patch an old one. Otherwise, they will have torn the new garment, and the patch from the new will not match the old.”

Picture the scene you have an old pair of jeans that has a hole in the knee. You go out to buy a new pair and bring them home. At home you find your best scissors and proceed to chop the knee from the new pair so you can sew it onto the old pair. What’s the problem? You’re now left with an old pair with a mismatched patch and a new pair that are ruined because you just chopped a hole in them!

Don’t destroy the new in an attempt to hold onto the old.

Jesus’ second illustration is in verse thirty-seven, “No one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined.”

Wineskins were made of animal skins that were sewn up. At first they were supple. New wine was poured in which emitted gas as it fermented and so stretched the skins. Fine, at first. Over time the skin would harden so it wasn’t flexible. If, then, new, unfermented wine was poured into the hard skin, the skin would burst and both the old skin and the new wine would be lost.

Again, don’t destroy the new in an attempt to hold onto the old.

The message for Jesus’ original hearers was that “to attempt to contain the gospel within the bounds of Judaism will only destroy both.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Few of us will be tempted to do this. So what does this passage mean for us?

The meaning for us in found in verse thirty-nine where we read, “no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for they say, ‘The old is better.’” When faced with a choice between the new wine or the old, the old is chosen. It’s known. It’s trusted. It’s perceived as safe and better.

What Jesus is saying here is that the Pharisees were never going to choose the new way of the gospel. They saw the old way as better. And although we won’t try to contain the gospel in Judaism. We are still liable to be more attached to our old lives than to turn wholly to the new. Our comfortable cultural way of doing things.

Yet when we try to have it all. The effects are the same. To work 24/7 to compete in the modern workplace and we patch try to patch the gospel on, we’re left with two ruined things. When we try to be a Christian whilst behaving according to our culture’s standards. The old skin bursts and the new wine is lost. The gospel is a new start. It’s a new life. It cannot be mixed with the old.

Have you broken with the old ways?

*Conclusion*

Failing to receive Jesus as good news is not only like taking a tax rebate letter and saying, “No thank you, I don’t need it.” It’s worse. The gospel is about our true and deepest need. But it’s a need so deep. And so dark. That we would rather not admit it were there.

It’s also a good news that changes our lives. Jesus call is to repentance. To a change of life. To leaving everything and following him. It has a cost.

We’re left with this truth today. The gospel calls us to repentance which is offensive to us. We have to admit we’re sinners. The gospel calls us to forsake the old ways. The pattern of this world. Are we willing to do that?

We must count the cost. But it’s worth it. Jesus is a wonderful Lord and the mighty God. He’s worth it. Let’s come to him.

1. I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Exeter [Eng.]: Paternoster Press, 1978), p. 227. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)