

“THROUGH THE BIBLE”

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LUKE 4-5

In 1979 a young Loatian immigrant arrived in the US as a political refugee.

Being skeptical of government agents Nikone refused to give them his last name. One of the custom officials wrote in the blank the word “Unknown.”

Today, a lot has changed for Nikone. He’s now a restaurant owner in Mississippi. But his legal name remains the same, “Nikone Unknown.”

He, his wife, and his kids are the “Unknowns.”

Well, as Luke 4 opens Jesus is an *unknown*. He’s on the threshold of His ministry. After being baptized by John, He returns to Nazareth and settles in Capernaum. He works miracles, casts out demons, and challenges tradition.

Suddenly, the whole nation is abuzz over Jesus. He begins chapter 4 an *unknown*, but by the end of chapter 5 He’s become *a household word*.

Chapter 4 “Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being tempted for forty days by the devil. And in those days He ate nothing, and afterward, when they had ended, He was hungry.” The baptism of Jesus was a turning point in His life. At His baptism the Father affirmed Jesus’ identity, and filled Him with the Holy Spirit. Jesus’ *credentials were filed* and *His potentials were filled*...

John 3:34 tells us Jesus received the Spirit “without measure.” All the power – all the spiritual gifts – was given to Jesus. Nothing was withheld.

And though the *portion* was unique, the *principle* is common.

Jesus was *led by the Spirit* and *empowered with the Spirit* as an example to you and me. We also need to be led by the Spirit, not by our own directives.

And look at where the Spirit leads Jesus... *right into the teeth of temptation*.

Understand it’s not a sin to be tempted. Jesus did everything right. He was in the Spirit, yet he was still tempted by the devil. Apparently, God grows us strong through resistance. Spiritual resistance training builds spiritual muscles.

Verse 3 “And the devil said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.” What was the first temptation? You might be *tempted* to say “*command this stone to become bread*,” but not so. The first words to Jesus out of the devil’s mouth were “*If You are the Son of God...*”

As a Christian everything begins and ends with my identity in Christ.

If I know *who I am* and *what I have* in Christ... I can beat back any doubt, and untangle any confusion, and work my way out of any discouragement.

But if Satan causes me to doubt my faith, and my position in Christ, he’s got me in his pocket. He can use my uncertainty to steer me as he pleases.

Even Jesus needed to be certain of His spiritual identity.

And this forms the basis of His temptation. Satan tries to badger Jesus into proving that He's God's Son, rather than relying on the Father's testimony at His baptism. Here he's tempting Jesus to turn a stone into a loaf of bread.

"But Jesus answered him, saying, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.'" Food in and of itself is not a sin. We not only like to eat we need to eat - especially after you've fasted for 40 days.

But this is how Satan tempts us. He starts with a *legitimate* need – for food, or friends, or sex, or money, or love, or attention – and he tempts us with an *illegitimate way* to meet that *legitimate need*. You resist temptation by believing God will meet your need in His way - in His time - by His Word.

And how do we know God's ways? Jesus quotes Scripture. He says, "*It is written...*" and He quotes Deuteronomy 8:3. Real deep-down soul-satisfaction isn't found in *our pantry*. It's found in *God's pantry*. We need to trust Him.

"Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, "All his authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours." Remember this was Jesus! God had already promised Him the kingdoms of this world. The Angel told Mary He would sit on David's throne.

The temptation here is to have it now... If Jesus bows to Satan He can have authority now - *without the wait* – *without the pain* – *without the cross*...

This is how Satan tempts us. *He offers short-cuts... sex without the strings of marriage - rewards without work – privileges without the responsibility...*

And again Jesus answers Satan with Scripture, verse 8. "*Get behind Me, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.'*" This time Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:13.

"Then he brought Him to Jerusalem, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here."

Each morning before daybreak, a priest would climb to the pinnacle of the Temple, and look eastward for the rising sun. When the sun peeped over the horizon the priest would sound a trumpet, the doors of the Temple swung opened - allowing waiting worshippers to stream into its sacred halls.

But what if Jesus threw Himself off the pinnacle at just the right time, in front of thousands of worshippers – what a way to *jump start* His ministry...

Satan was a marketing genius. What an idea... *It just wasn't God's idea.*

The Father sent Jesus to be *a servant* not *a show-off* - to capture the hearts of men and women with *truth* and *tenderness*, not *theatrics*.

But notice what Satan tried to do with this last temptation. He starts quoting verses. "*For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over You, to keep You,'"* and, "*In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.'*" Hey, Satan is *Mister Twister*. He's a master at making the Bible say what it was never meant to say. He takes the *text* out of *context*.

“And Jesus answered and said to him, "It has been said, 'You shall not tempt the LORD your God.'" The verses Satan quotes are Psalms. They speak of *protection*, not *presumption*. God will come to our aid when we're doing His will, but He doesn't let us use Him for our own selfish reasons.

Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:16 - *God is nobody's stooge*.

Legitimate needs, short-cuts, wrong methods can be temptations. We learn to avoid them *by knowing who we are in Christ, and by knowing His Word*.

“Now when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an *opportune time*.” Notice the battle isn't over. Satan was defeated. He sloughed off to lick his wounds, but he'll try again later. He's persistence.

He waits for an *“opportune time”* when you're tired, hungry, frisky... *beware!*

“Then Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and news of Him went out through all the surrounding region. And He taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.” Work a miracle and word gets around.

There was great speculation surrounding Jesus. *Just who is this Man? Teacher? Politician? Prophet? Magician? Or perhaps, even the Messiah?*

Questions were swirling around Jesus as He returned to His hometown.

“So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day...” Notice, it was Jesus habit to go to church! Synagogue was a priority. “And (he) stood up to read.” And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written...” Isaiah 61...

Jesus read, "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD." Ever wondered about God's will for your life? What does He really desire? Well, in these two verses Jesus declares His intentions...

He brings good news to those who lack.

He heals people who've been inwardly hurt and emotionally wounded.

He unshackles people who've been locked up in addictive behaviors.

He opens the eyes of people who've been blinded by doubt and lust.

He frees folks who've been beaten up, and trapped in their own bitterness.

And He does it today! I love how Peterson paraphrases verse 19, “*To announce, 'This is God's year to act!'*” All that He's listed, He does right now.

“Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him.” You could hear a pin drop. Everyone knew Isaiah was describing the Messiah's ministry.

Would Jesus ascribe this to another man, or claim it for Himself?

“And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." Here's a definitive moment when Jesus claims to be the chosen Messiah. What Isaiah spoke 700 years earlier, Jesus applies to Himself.

And rest assured it still applies today. These are still His intentions for us.

“So all bore witness to Him, and marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth.” The crowd was on the verge of belief, until a few skeptics in the back spoke up, “And they said, “Is this not Joseph's son?”

“Wait a minute, He’s nobody special. He’s just the carpenter’s boy.”

“(Jesus) said to them, “You will surely say this proverb to Me, ‘Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in Your country.’” Then He said, “Assuredly, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own country.” This was a popular proverb. The modern day equivalent might be, “Familiarity breeds contempt.” Folks are too proud to admit their former peeps might have a special status, or be favored by God. *“We were in the same 3rd grade class at Nazareth Elementary... He’s nobody special.”*

People lift themselves up by keeping other people down.

But Jesus answered, verse 25, “But I tell you truly, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a great famine throughout all the land; but to none of them was Elijah sent except to Zarephath, in the region of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.”

In both instances, Israelis were too proud to go to God’s prophet for help.

Yet God was so determined to heal and bless He went outside the borders of Israel to find a person humble enough to bring their need to God.

And tonight, if God can’t find a person in Barrow County who wants His help He’ll go all the way to Loganville or Jefferson to heal and forgiven.

Verse 28 “So all those in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath (the truth will make you mad), and rose up and thrust Him out of the city; and they led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw Him down over the cliff.” On our tours to Israel we go to the top of this precipice - 44 feet above the valley. It’s a steep drop.

And the intentions of the townspeople were to push Jesus over... but, “Then passing through the midst of them, He went His way.” It was a miracle.

The same Lord, who parted the Red Sea, parted an angry mob.

Verse 31 “Then He went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee...”

Capernaum is a fishing city on the NW coast of the Sea of Galilee. It was the home of many of the disciples. It served as Jesus' headquarters in Galilee.

And Jesus “was teaching them on the Sabbaths. And they were astonished at His teaching, for His word was with authority.” The rabbis appealed to other rabbis, but Jesus declared, *“Thus says the Lord.”* Jesus spoke for God.

“Now in the synagogue there was a man who had a spirit of an unclean demon. And he cried out with a loud voice, saying, Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us?”

I know who You are - the Holy One of God!” Jesus doesn’t pick this fight.

It’s the demon who’s annoyed by Jesus. This is why I question preachers who’re always chasing demons, looking for a spiritual skirmish. If you shine the light of Jesus you won’t have to search for the demons, they’ll find you.

Verse 35 “But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be quiet, and come out of him!”

And when the demon had thrown him in their midst, it came out of him and did not hurt him." Today, demons may behave in more sophisticated ways, but they're just as real. And Jesus has the power to rebuke and cast out demons.

"Then they were all amazed and spoke among themselves, saying, "What a word this is! For with authority and power He commands the unclean spirits, and they come out." And the report about Him went out into every place in the surrounding region." How Jesus evicted this demon impressed the Jews almost as much as the fact He did. At the time, Jewish exorcist roamed the countryside using all kinds of bizarre techniques to cast out demons.

They would hook a ring in a victim's nose and try to pull out the demon. They recited incantations. They'd placed a victim in a basin of water and tried to splash the demon out... Jesus just spoke a word, and the demon obeyed.

"Now He arose from the synagogue and entered Simon's house. But Simon's wife's mother was sick with a high fever, and they made request of Him concerning her." This "Simon" is later renamed. He's called "Peter." And note Peter has a mother-in-law - which means a wife. This is a *mega* problem for Catholics who consider Peter the first pope. If so, he was a *married pope!*

But Peter's problem was his mother-in-law has a "high fever." Luke uses the Greek word "megas" – a "mega-fever" - maybe it was malaria.

Verse 39 "So He stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. And immediately she arose and served them." The Greek word translated "rebuke" means "to muzzle." Some of you might want to muzzle your mother-in-law, but Jesus muzzled her fever. *And notice how she responded to her healing?*

She served! *Receive a healing touch from Jesus and you'll want to serve.*

Verse 40 "When the sun was setting, all those who had any that were sick with various diseases brought them to Him; and He laid His hands on every one of them and healed them." Dr. Luke notes Jesus healed "various diseases." He wasn't just a specialist in fevers. He was a General Practitioner.

"And demons also came out of many, crying out and saying, "You are the Christ, the Son of God!" And He, rebuking them, did not allow them to speak, for they knew that He was the Christ." Jesus shut them up for two reasons... crowd control, and He didn't want demons in charge of His publicity.

"Now when it was day, He departed and went into a deserted place." Jesus modeled how to stay spiritually fit – He spent time in the Word and prayer...

"And the crowd sought Him and came to Him, and tried to keep Him from leaving them; but He said to them, "I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent." And He was preaching in the synagogues of Galilee." Notice, if you don't set your priorities other people will. People like to turn *their crisis* into *your emergency*.

Jesus said, "*I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also...*"

Jesus understood the "musts" God had placed on His life. Are you following the *commands of God* or the *demands of people*? Focus on *your musts!*

One Sunday morning two men skipped church to go fishing. After a few hours one of the fishermen started to feel guilty. He confessed, "Charlie, I guess I should've gone to church today." Charlie answered him, "Clem, I couldn't have gone to church anyway. My wife is home sick in bed."

Well, in Luke 5 Jesus has church and goes fishing. He takes His disciples *fishing* and gives them a new *mission*. He sets for them new priorities...

"So it was, as the multitude pressed about Him to hear the word of God, that He stood by the Lake of Gennesaret..." or the "Sea of Galilee." It's a pear-shaped, fresh water lake in northern Israel, 14 miles long by 7 miles wide.

Luke calls it a "*lake*," not a "*sea*." He sail the Mediterranean with Paul. To Luke it was a *lake*. Matthew was a land-locked Hebrew. To him it was a *sea*.

At the time of Jesus the western or Galilean bank was the most populated.

The "Plain of Gennesaret" or "Nof Ginnosar" as the Hebrews called it runs down the western shore. This was the Jewish side of the lake. Magdala, Gennesaret, Capernaum, Chorazin, Bethsaida dotted the shoreline. The people who lived there were eager to see Jesus. They came out in droves.

"And (Jesus) saw two boats standing by the lake; but the fishermen had gone from them and were washing their nets." The good fishing was at night. These guys were done for the day. They were cleaning up and heading home.

Then (Jesus) got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little from the land. And He sat down and taught the multitudes from the boat." The boat became a stage Jesus used to teach the crowd.

In 1986 there was a severe drought in Israel. The lake's water level was at an all time low. Two brothers Moshe and Yuval Lufan found a boat protruding from the mud. They were members of the local Kibbutz on the western shore.

The boat was 27' long by 8' wide. Tests dated it to the first century AD.

It could've been Simon's boat from which Jesus taught. There's no way to know, but the kibbutz calls it "The Jesus Boat," and has put it on display.

Verse 4 "When (Jesus) had stopped speaking, He said to Simon, "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." Let's go fishing!

"But Simon answered and said to Him, "Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net." Simon was skeptical. "Lord, we've tried! We've fished the best spots, at the best time. They're just not biting." Yet if Jesus wants to cast off he'll humor Him...

Hey, Simon was content to follow Jesus as long as He was teaching and talking Scripture, but fishing was his domain. He was the expert. And Jesus is doing it wrong... *wrong time, wrong place, wrong depth*... Simon isn't so sure he wants Jesus telling him what to do when it comes to his area of expertise.

Like the husband who took his wife fishing. He said afterwards, "She did everything wrong – she was too noisy, she used the wrong bait, she had a bad cast, she reeled her line in too slow – and she caught more fish than I did."

“And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking. So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink.” Imagine all the hoot’n and holler’n between the two boats of fishermen.

“When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!” For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish which they had taken; and so also were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men.”

Peter *caught a school*, and *went to school*. Jesus climbed into *Peter’s boat* to prove to Him that He was Lord over all of life. You think you’ve got your **marriage** wired - or you’re good at **business** - or you’re an expert **parent**.

But one day, you catch nothing, and Jesus tells you to throw out your nets in another direction, and suddenly you realize you’re not the expert after all.

This is certainly true when it comes to fishing for men. Jesus used this thrilling event to give His disciples a new mission. Rather than *catch fish*, from now on they’ll “*catch men*.” *And here’s what you learn quickly in ministry...*

You can toil all night without a nibble. You can waste time and burn out on your own ideas – or you can listen to Jesus, and toss your nets at His word!

Verse 11 “*So when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed Him.*” From now on they’ll fish a world instead of a lake – use the Word instead of worms – fill the church and not a boat. They’ll fish for men!

And they learn next that they’ll fish for the most unlikely men...

“And it happened when He was in a certain city, that behold, a man who was full of leprosy saw Jesus; and he fell on his face and implored Him, saying, “Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.” Leprosy was the AIDS of the ancient world. It was dreaded disease, called “*the living death*.”

It began with a brownish spot - that became a nodule - then an ulcerated sore – before long it ate away the tissue and gross deformities occurred. Leprosy turned fingers and feet into nubs. It produced nostrils without noses – sockets without eyes. Throats without a palate would gurgle sounds.

And that didn’t include the social abandonment. The leper was an untouchable. He lived in the colony. No one could risk contact with a leper.

The Jews believed it took an act of God to heal leprosy. Thus, for this man to ask Jesus to heal him, he was expressing his belief that Jesus was God.

Verse 13 “*Then (Jesus) put out His hand and touched him, saying, “I am willing; be cleansed.” Immediately the leprosy left him.*” No rabbi came within six feet of a leper. You threw rocks at him to keep him at bay. But not Jesus!

Jesus didn’t have to touch this man to heal him, but He did touch him to show him how much He was loved. He healed his heart as well as his body.

“And (Jesus) charged him to tell no one, “But go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as a testimony to them, just as Moses commanded.”

Leviticus 14 sets out a procedure to conform a leper's healing, grant His forgiveness, and welcome him back into the community.

Jesus wanted his restoration complete - and he reunited with his family.

Verse 15 "However, the report went around concerning Him all the more; and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by Him of their infirmities. So He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed."

As His public life broadened, Jesus deepened His personal life. He spent time with God. Rather than spread Himself too thin, Jesus stayed rooted.

"Now it happened on a certain day, as He was teaching, that there were Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting by, who had come out of every town of Galilee, Judea, and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was present to heal them." There seems to be seasons where healings are more prevalent.

God's power can always heal, but there're windows of opportunity...

This was one such moment... "Then behold, men brought on a bed a man who was paralyzed, whom they sought to bring in and lay before Him. And when they could not find how they might bring him in, because of the crowd, they went up on the housetop and let him down with his bed through the tiling into the midst before Jesus." Obviously, the Fire Marshal was absent. There was no handicap access. The place was a madhouse – packed to the gills.

The only way to get the lame man to Jesus was to tear away the thatched roof, and lower him. *How about an impromptu skylight in your living room?*

But don't miss the lesson. There're a lot of people who can't get to Jesus on their own. This man was blessed. He had very determined friends.

"When (Jesus) saw their faith..." *Who's faith?* Not the lame man's faith, but the faith of his friends. "He said to him, "Man, your sins are forgiven you."

And I'm sure this was a *real letdown* to the man's friends. His obvious problem was his crippled legs. But Jesus looked past the physical need to the real need – his spiritual need. So what if he can walk... *all the way to hell.*

More than *functional legs*, this man needed a *forgiven heart*.

Verse 21 "And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, "Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

The religious folks were quick to pick up on the implications. In Judaism only God can forgive sin. Either Jesus was God or He was a blasphemer.

"But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, He answered and said to them, "Why are you reasoning in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Rise up and walk?'" Both took the hand of God.

Jesus is about to heal, in order to prove that He can pardon.

"But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins" - He said to the man who was paralyzed, "I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house." Immediately he rose up before them, took up what he had been lying on, and departed to his own house, glorifying God."

Notice, the faith of his friends got him to Jesus, but it took his own faith to receive a miracle... And Jesus gives this fellow an impossible command...

Imagine a quadriplegic from Sheppard's Spinal Clinic, he's in a wheelchair. Someone combs his hair and feeds him everyday. Suddenly, Jesus says to him, "*Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.*" You say, "*Say what?*"

Jesus' command was all about *willingness* not *ability*. As soon as this man believed – in the microsecond it took for his brain to fire-off nerve impulses to his legs – God did a miracle. He strengthened those legs so he could obey.

God's power wasn't unleashed until the man was willing to believe.

Verse 26 "*And they were all amazed, and they glorified God and were filled with fear, saying, "We have seen strange things today!"*" Indeed they had.

"After these things He went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, "Follow Me." Understand tax collectors were hated by the Jews. They worked for the Romans. They were traitors.

The Romans had a *poll tax, ground tax, and income tax*. They taxed your right to exist, eat, and work. And these tax collectors worked on commission. Anything over their quota they pocketed, so they always charged an excess.

It reminds me of three men sleeping at a farmhouse - a Hindu, Jew, and an IRS agent? The room only had only two beds, so the Hindu volunteered to sleep in the barn. Yet when he walked into the barn there was a cow. He returned. He couldn't sleep with a cow. It would be against his religion.

That's when the Jew volunteered. But there was a pig. He couldn't stay with a pig. It was against his religion. Finally, the IRS agent went to the barn. A little while later, there was a knock at the door. *There stood the pig and the cow.*

Levi was a despised tax-collector, yet Jesus added him to His family.

Verse 28 is amazing. It says of Levi, "*So he left all, rose up, and followed Him.*" Whether this was a first encounter we're not sure, but Levi couldn't have known much about Jesus. Yet there was something about Him that attracted this hated tax collector. Two words from Jesus, "*Follow Me,*" changed his life.

"Then Levi gave Him a great feast in his own house. And there were a great number of tax collectors and others who sat down with them. And their scribes and the Pharisees complained against His disciples, saying, "Why do You eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" In the ancient world to eat with someone showed acceptance. To pull from the same loaf made us one.

The Pharisees felt they were better than other people and enjoyed highlighting the contrasts. Jesus was better than others, but He enjoyed emphasizing the commonalities. Jesus never lowered the bar, but He loved people. He was real and genuine. Even the worst sinners warmed to Him.

I've heard it put, "*Life is all about bridges – which ones to build, which ones to cross, and which ones to burn.*" Jesus builds bridges. Pharisees burn bridges. Many of the sinners joined Levi and crossed the bridge to Jesus.

Verse 31 "Jesus answered (the Pharisees) and said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." Jesus came to save people who recognize their need to be saved. There's no such thing as *good guys* and *bad guys*. We're all bad guys who need Jesus. *But do we admit it?*

"Then they said to Him, "Why do the disciples of John fast often and make prayers, and likewise those of the Pharisees, but Yours eat and drink?"

And He said to them, "Can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them; then they will fast in those days."

Fasting heightens our spiritual awareness of God's presence. Jesus' men didn't need to fast because God was present among them physically.

When Jesus leaves, then they'll have plenty of time and reason to fast.

The Pharisees questioned the fasting of others, but it was their fasting that needed analysis. It was hollow ritual. Jesus answers them by exposing the dangers of tradition. "Then He spoke a parable to them: "No one puts a piece from a new garment on an old one; otherwise the new makes a tear, and also the piece that was taken out of the new does not match the old." Put a new patch on an old pair of Wranglers, and when the patch shrinks; the jeans tear.

Likewise, "No one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine will burst the wineskins and be spilled, and the wineskins will be ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins, and both are preserved." Put new wine in a brittle, old wineskin - and when the wine ferments, it'll burst the skin.

This is a talk about tradition... Over time Judaism, like all religious structures, became an old wineskin. It started out supporting God's work, but soon it interfered. Religious structures grow unbending. They lack the flexibility to move with the new work created by God's Spirit and God's grace.

God included Gentiles in his family. Religion excluded Gentiles.

God's goal is to inflame love. Religion's goal is to enforce law.

God is into heartfelt worship. Religion makes worship about days and duty.

God says obey Jesus... religion insists that we obey religion.

God is creative in all He does... religion forms a rut.

To follow Jesus we can't be stuck in religion. As people and as a church we need to be tuned in to the Spirit. We should value *flexibility* over *formality*.

In verse 39 Jesus proves how well He knows human nature. "And no one, having drunk old wine, immediately desires new; for he says, 'The old is better.'" The human tendency is to resist change, even change for the better.

Here's a true adage, "There's no growth without change – no change without loss - no loss without pain." Thus, change is uncomfortable at first.

Remember the seven last words of a dying church, "We have always done it that way." Let's avoid the rut, and be open to the movements of the Spirit.