

# Luke 9: Conclusion of the Galilean ministry

## LEFTOVER #1: WINE SKINS

1. Just before the sabbath controversy of 6:1-5, Jesus teaches about fasting (5:33-39). To explain why his disciples don't fast, Jesus delivers the brief parables of the old and new garments and the old and new wineskins. At a basic level these parables assert the incompatibility of the old and the new, these being:<sup>1</sup>
  - The **old** is: the “old patterns of thought” (Craig A. Evans, 96), living “according to the law” and its “antiquated commandments” (Cyril of Alexandria); fasting (Ambrose); “man-made legalism” (Carson, *New Bible Commentary*); “the old tradition of Judaism” (Darrell Bock's smaller commentary, 111)
  - The **new** is: the the gospel (Craig Evans, 96), and particularly the “new way, new forms and a new spirit” of the gospel (Bock)

Being incompatible, the old and the new can't be combined; you must take all of Jesus or nothing:

“He teaches that he has come not merely to add devotional routines to those already practiced... Merely to 'patch things up'—i.e., to have a dinner celebration in place of fasting would fail...” (Walter Liefeld, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 885)

These parables are presented in a way which suggests they embody a general principle which Jesus is applying to the practice of fasting and prayer:

- “The real challenge of this passage is to see where... people are living today as though the old age was still the norm, as though the new life of the gospel had never burst in upon us. The task then is to live out the new life, the new energy, which was at the heart of Jesus' teaching and work.” (N. T. Wright, *Luke for Everyone*, 65)
- In context, the old wine is the old covenant; the old wineskin is rabbinism; the new wine is the new covenant; the new wineskin is perhaps “emphasis on relational union and sharing God's love with others”. The old wineskins now represent the formalisms and religious practices of the church, including language (church speak), music (songs from previous centuries), dress (dressing up for church), architecture (steeple, pews, etc.), taboos and rules (e.g. against bars, dancing, rock concerts, alcohol, movies, etc.) The general principle is to reject formalisms when they have outlived their usefulness. (Dennis McCallum)

Discuss.

## LEFTOVER #2: JESUS AND THE SIGNS OF JUBILEE

2. In his inaugural sermon (4:16-22), Jesus quotes Isaiah 61:1-2a,

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor

Later when John the Baptist is in prison he begins to doubt and receives this message from Jesus:

Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them

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<sup>1</sup> Joel B. Green (*NICNT*, 250) differs in believing Jesus' way is the old—after all, everyone knows the old wine is preferred. For him, the old is Jesus' practices, which Luke takes pains to show are consistent with OT prophecy, and the new are the Pharisees': “Jesus interprets his behaviors, which are questionable and innovative to some onlookers, as manifestations of God's ancient purpose coming to fruition, while the concerns of the Pharisees are rejected not only as innovative but also as quite inconsistent with God's program.”

In Jesus' Galilean ministry, the gospel is sent not just through (verbal) evangelism, but also through what could be called the "signs of Jubilee", to which Isa 61 (and 58) point (see also Acts 2:22).

- a) Recently there has come about an organization, Rolling Jubilee, which, very much in the spirit of the year of Jubilee, pays off debts. Where do you see the signs of Jubilee in the modern church and/or its ministries?
- b) What phrase immediately follows the passage Jesus quotes from Isa 61:1-2? Why doesn't Jesus read *that*?

### THE 12 GO ON A SHORT-TERM MISSION (9:1-9)

3. Jesus sent out the 12 with strict instructions to take "nothing for your journey"—no staff, bag, bread, extra tunic, or money. They were not to hop from house to house (which some traveling teachers would do to drum up extra support). They were to proclaim the kingdom (which, since they were still unclear on Jesus' identity and plan, may simply have consisted of the Sermon on the Plain/Mount, and Jesus' parables), to heal people and to cast out demons. In short, they were to do what Jesus had been doing, with the exception of forgiving sins and interpreting the law.

Jesus' instructions have some interesting parallels:

- The word used here for "bag", *pera*, "was commonly used to designate both a leather pouch in which provisions could be carried and a wallet for collecting alms... The latter use was so well known and such a symbol of itinerant begging preachers [and Cynic philosophers] that it probably has the same sense here." (Gabelin, 919-20)
  - "The Essenes often traveled without any provisions in anticipation of being received by fellow believers as one of the family (see Josephus, *War*, 2.124)" (Wright, *Luke for Everyone*, 141)
  - Jesus' prohibitions are reminiscent of the rules in the Mishnah for those visiting the temple: "A man should not behave himself unseemly while opposite the Eastern Gate [of the temple] since it faces the Holy of Holies. He may not enter into the temple mount with his staff or his sandal or his wallet or with the dust of his feet..." (quoted by Wright, 141-2)
- a) Later, Jesus would tell his apostles to take provisions when spreading the gospel (Lk 22:35-38). Why the difference?<sup>2</sup>
  - b) Hospitality was taken much more seriously in Jesus' culture than in ours. Still, traveling without provisions did entail risk. What was the worst-case scenario for the 12 on their mission?
  - c) Jesus called his disciples to step out on a limb in faith while carrying out their mission. How might we do the same with our youth? *Should* we?
  - d) Jesus gave the 12 power and authority over demons and to cure diseases. They exercised these, and also preached the kingdom. While we may share the gospel with our friends, we are less likely to cast out their demons or heal their diseases. If not these, then what signs of God's power do we see at the interface between our community and the world?

### THE TRANSFIGURATION (9:28-36)

4. As Zechariah, ecstatic in his freedom from muteness, declared, "[God] has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David, *as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old*" (Lk 1:69-70). Some of these prophecies point to direct fulfillment, as in the descriptions of the passion in Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53 (let alone Daniel's "weeks"). Other prophecies, though, are *typological*, in which an OT pattern is replicated in an NT event. For example, aside from merely being on a mountain with

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<sup>2</sup> Craig A. Evans writes, "This preaching and healing tour both was and wasn't a model for the life of the church after Pentecost. Nowhere do we hear that the early church acted like this."

Moses present, the Transfiguration has the following parallels with Moses and Exodus:<sup>3</sup>

- It comes “six days later” than the previous account (Mk 9:2); Moses spent six days on the mountain (Ex 24:16)
- A cloud covers the mountain (Lk 9:34; Ex 24:16)
- God's voice emerges from the cloud (Lk 9:35; Ex 24:16)
- There are three companions (Lk 9:28; Ex 24:1, 9)
- The transformed appearance of Jesus/Moses (Lk 9:29; Ex 34:30)
- The reaction of fear (Mk 9:6; Ex 34:30)

Luke brings out the parallels by listing Moses first (9:30), speaking of Jesus' “departure” using the Greek *exodos* (9:31); explicitly referring to Jesus “glory” (9:32). Additionally, in Luke the Transfiguration occurs “about eight days after” Jesus foretells his death and resurrection, which many think is a reference to the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev 23:33-44) when the people are to dwell in booths, which Peter explicitly proposes, wittingly or unwittingly recalling the exodus.<sup>4</sup>

What's different is at least as important as what's similar. How does this account break from the exodus pattern, and why?

5. The Transfiguration was literally a mountain-top experience for Jesus, Peter, James and John. It comes in Luke right after Jesus' prediction of his passion, right before the twelve, despite their successful mission in 9:1-6, hit a brick wall with the demonized boy (9:37-43), and before Jesus turns his face toward Jerusalem (9:51). This experience was to stay with Peter for the rest of his life. We see in 2 Peter that knowing he is soon going to his death (1:14), this is where his mind turns. For his readers if not for himself, he points to the Transfiguration (1:18) as evidence that he isn't giving his life in vain, nor are they following “cleverly invented stories” (1:15).

Wright says,

These [mountain-top experiences] are never given for their own sake, but so that, as we are equipped by them, God can use us within his needy world... We, too, [like Peter on the mountain] often find it completely bewildering to know how to understand all that God is doing and saying, both in our times of great joy and great sadness. But the word that comes to us, leading us on to follow Jesus even when we haven't a clue what's going on, is the word that came from the cloud on that strange day in Galilee: 'This is my son, my chosen one. Listen to him.'<sup>5</sup>

What mountain-top experiences do you look to when the road ahead is darkest and most uncertain? What experiences from your past most say to you, “This is my son, my chosen one. Listen to him.”

#### EVANGELISM SCHOOL

6. Much of Jesus' teaching served to prepare his disciples to spread the gospel, such as his explanation of why he taught in parables (8:9) and the parable of the Sower, which describes the various responses they could expect (8:4-8; 11-15). To these we could add:
  - ‘Jesus answered, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance.”’ (5:31-32)
  - “Whenever they do not welcome you, as you are leaving that town, shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.” (9:5)

<sup>3</sup> This list is taken from Craig A. Evan's commentary, p. 150-1.

<sup>4</sup> The Transfiguration also follows shortly after the feeding of the 5,000 families, which has its own obvious parallels to Moses and the Israelites in the desert. It is followed by Jesus' complaint of the “crooked and perverse generation” (v. 40), which echoes Deut 32:4-5.

<sup>5</sup> *Luke for Everyone*, p. 144-5.

- “He said to them, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.'” (10:2)

What do these each say about spreading the gospel? Are they reflected in the way we share Jesus with others?

### WHO IS THE GREATEST? (9:46-48)

7. As if to emphasize their inability to perceive the gospel, Jesus’ foretelling his passion (9:43b-45) is followed by an argument among the disciples regarding who was the greatest. Jesus responds, “Whoever welcomes this child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me; for the least among all of you is the greatest.” This is very close to the answer he gives much later in Luke when they fall back into the same argument: “the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves” (22:26). Jesus follows this by presenting himself as the prime example of one who serves.
  - a) Jesus embodied this humility in his life-giving service. How was it also reflected in the way he interacted with others?
  - b) Jesus is breaking with a social scale on which child  $\ll$  adult, and disciple  $\ll$  rabbi. What scale is this? Honor? Prestige? Power? Name some modern Western equivalents.
  - c) How, how, how is John’s statement in 9:49 an answer to Jesus’ statement in 9:48?
  - d) Most of us dwell in a world with smaller gradients in this social scale than in Jesus’ culture. At home the biggest gradient is likely child to parent, but that is much less than it was in Jesus’ day. At work many of us interact primarily with colleagues. The elderly in our society are not revered as they are in other cultures. Even our suburban church has few strong social gradients, being relatively uniform in class and ethnicity. How do we heed Jesus’ words in this context? Do we seek to interact with those outside our small altitude range? Or do we merely give thanks that modern American culture, which has more than its share of propensity to sin, is not as prone to this one?

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*Fun Fact:* The three who are glorified on the mount of the Transfiguration all have unusual ends: Moses is buried by God, Elijah is translated, and Jesus is resurrected.