

# Potomac Hills Community Church

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## Power to Change

### “Revealed Grace” - a series from Luke Luke 5:33-39

#### **INTRODUCTION: *Begin at the end.***<sup>1</sup>

I want to do something different today. I want to start with the closing story. You know, often I have a story at the end of the message that illustrates the main point of the message. Today we're going to start with that story.

It's a story Max Lucado tells about a man he knows named Steven.

Steven was 23. And his 23 years had been hard ones. His arm was scarred from the needle and his wrist was scarred from the knife. His pride was his fists and his weakness was his girl.

Steven's initial response to the love of Christ was great. As Max unfolded the story of Jesus before him, his hardened face would soften and his dark eyes would dance. He wanted to change.

But his girl friend would have none of it. Oh, she would listen politely, but her heart was gripped by darkness. Any changes Steven made would be quickly muffled, as she would craftily maneuver him back into his old habits. She was the last thing between him and the kingdom. Max begged him to leave her. Steven was trying to put new wine into an old wineskin.

He wrestled for days trying to decide what to do. Finally, he reached a decision. He couldn't leave her. The last time he saw Max he wept uncontrollably. And Max held this big, tough kid in his arms.

And he realized the prophecy of Jesus was true.

By putting his new wine into an old skin, it was lost.

To come to Christ means exercising faith and repentance.

Repentance means change.

And change means getting rid of anything that can't coexist with Christ.

You can't put new life into an old lifestyle.

The inevitable tragedy occurs.

The new life is lost.

And this morning we read the passage where Jesus says that.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from On the Anvil by Max Lucado, pages 23-24.

But first, we haven't done this in a while, so we're due ...

**REMINDERS: *What is this book about?*** <sup>2</sup>

We're at a major break point in the book of Luke. Luke has finished the first of several sections about the power of Jesus revealed through supernatural miracles, healings, and divine insight into the thoughts and motives of others.

Now Luke is going to show us how Jesus deals with His critics and adversaries and will use these confrontations as a means of teaching His followers.

Since we're at this breakpoint in the narrative, I thought it would be a good time to review once again what this book is about, to help you remember what the major themes are and to be aware of them when they show up in the text.

As I've said many times, Luke is the author of this book **and** the Book of Acts, written as Volumes 1 & 2 in the story of Christ and His Church.

In these two books, you'll see that Luke has four major themes:

First, there is an over-riding sense of the **Sovereign** plan of God at work in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Luke was concerned to show us that everything runs according to a single plan laid out by God.

Second, there is a constant emphasis on **Jesus** having come to be the Savior of the World. Jesus challenges people's expectations throughout the book and forces those He encounters, then and now, to consider **who He is** and **what He did according to His terms** ... as Savior and Lord ... and then to respond accordingly. Everything Jesus does is designed to highlight this unique point ... **that He is the Son of God and Savior of sinners**.

Third, there's a constant emphasis on the Gospel. And the Gospel is the message of New Life in Christ that changes people and offers eternal life.

And finally, there is an emphasis on **Truth**. Luke writes so that you can be confident in knowing that what you are taught is the truth. In fact, that's exactly what he says in chapter 1, verses 3-4, "*Having carefully investigated all of these accounts from the beginning, I have decided to write a careful summary for you, to reassure you of the truth of all you were taught.*"

To sum up the book, it is the person of Jesus and the nature of God's work through Him to deliver us from sin that takes center stage. It shows us the Sovereign plan of God, the Savior through whom that plan takes place, the Gospel message that explains that plan, that it is all true, and that those who place their faith in Christ can rest confidently in that fact.

It will be important to remember those things as we work our way through the Book of Luke ... and understand that it's the story of "**Revealed Grace**."

We pick up the story at the end of chapter five with another one of these

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2 Some of this section is adapted from "The Preface" and "Introduction" from The NIV Application Commentary: Luke by Darrell Bock, pages 11-28, "Luke" Holman Bible Dictionary, "The Gospel of Luke" Life Application Notes, and "Introduction and Background to Luke" Lessonmaker by NavPress.

“encounters with Jesus.”

**Luke 5:33-39**, *“The religious leaders complained that Jesus' disciples were feasting instead of fasting. “John the Baptist's disciples always fast and pray,” they declared, “and so do the disciples of the Pharisees. Why are yours always feasting?” [34] Jesus asked, “Do wedding guests fast while celebrating with the groom? [35] Someday he will be taken away from them, and then they will fast.” [36] Then Jesus gave them this illustration: “No one tears a piece of cloth from a new garment and uses it to patch an old garment. For then the new garment would be torn, and the patch wouldn't even match the old garment. [37] And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. The new wine would burst the old skins, spilling the wine and ruining the skins. [38] **New wine must be put into new wineskins.** [39] But no one who drinks the old wine seems to want the fresh and the new. ‘The old is better,’ they say.””*

In these explanations and illustrations by Jesus we find a few lessons here that are important for us to understand.

First, we need to see that ...

**v. 33: APPEARANCES are not important**<sup>3</sup>

When we get to this passage, we have to remember what has just happened. Jesus had called Levi, the infamous tax collector, to become one of His followers. Now, to put it mildly, not everyone was excited about this. And then when Levi hosted a banquet for Jesus and invited his friends, “tax collectors and other various assorted sinners,” a lot of people thought that was less than appropriate.

Now the Pharisees and the other critics were right in one sense ... Levi's friends were indeed sinners, spiritual lepers in whom sin had run the full course. If the spiritual reality could have been translated into physical terms, it would have been a grotesque feast with leprous people using rotting limbs to shove the banquet food into gaping, featureless faces. Spiritually, you could say it was a feast of the living dead.

And the “good” people were taken aback by this celebration of these spiritual lepers. And even Jesus' explanation in verses 31-32 that *“Healthy people don't need a doctor—sick people do. I have come to call sinners to turn from their sins, not to spend my time with those who think they are already good enough”* didn't seem to carry any weight with these horrified critics.

They could not fathom the participation of Jesus and His disciples' in this shocking event, nor did they approve of their generally joyous approach to life, which seemed to exclude fasting.

So they set up this “test” question by comparing Jesus' feasting with their

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<sup>3</sup> Parts of the exposition of this passage have been adapted from Preaching the Word: Luke, Vol. 1 by R. Kent Hughes, pages 188-195.

more righteous fasting. And that forms the background for this accusatory question by the Pharisees we find in verse 33, “***The religious leaders complained that Jesus' disciples were feasting instead of fasting. "John the Baptist's disciples always fast and pray," they declared, "and so do the disciples of the Pharisees. Why are yours always feasting?"***

So they confront Jesus with His and His disciples' lack of fasting, and ask Him to justify this terrible feasting they see.

Now, please understand, fasting is not a bad thing. But it's not a major thing either. It was a common practice for the religious leaders. However, it's only commanded once in the Old Testament, with reference to Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, although it is mentioned as a practice several other times in the Old Testament.

But the Pharisees had gotten a hold of a good thing of God, given to help people draw closer to Him, and they had turned it into a burden. They made it an act of works-righteousness designed to curry favor with God, and so they decreed that the really “godly” people would fast twice a week. They tried to look as mournful and sorrowful as possible. They were even known to use a white powder to make themselves look emaciated. They tried to look miserable! They thought this outside display of feigned humility would appear impressive to God, not to mention all those “lesser” people around them.

They were truly doing something on the outside that was not reflective **at all** of what was really happening on the inside. They were proud on the inside of their outward show of humility. They were proud of appearing to be humble. And so, for them, the practice of religion became a solemn, joyless, and gloomy affair. And by golly, if they weren't having any fun, then neither should anyone else.

And many times, people do the same thing today. The church is full of preacher's who talk just like everyone unless until they get behind the pulpit and this strange and somber “preacher's voice” comes out in deep and somber tones. And you sit there and wonder, “What's that all about?” It sounds more like a Stephen King novel than someone proclaiming the Gospel.

The late humor writer, Erma Bombeck, once wrote about sitting in church one Sunday when she became captivated by a small girl in front of her who was turning around and smiling at everyone. Until her mother noticed and told the young girl, “Stop that grinning – you're in church!” Erma concluded her article by saying that some people came to church looking like they had just read the will of their rich aunt only to discover she left everything to the hamster.

And that sort of describe the Pharisees, and now they have to deal this man Jesus, who appears to them, to be a party animal of some disrepute.

So He is confronted and challenged.

And He gives a very interesting answer.

He tells them that ...

**v. 34-35: RELATIONSHIPS are important**

Jesus answered those who criticized the eating, drinking and joyful attitude of He and His disciples by asking, "*Do wedding guests fast while celebrating with the groom?*"

Now this answer was packed with meaning for His listeners. A newly married Jewish couple did not immediately leave on a honeymoon but stayed home for a week-long open house during which there was continual feasting and celebration. They were attended to by all their friends, the wedding guests, who were exempt from the rules of fasting for that week.

Jesus is asserting that His presence justifies a feast, and that His followers had the joyous privilege of a continuing wedding party. In such circumstances it is wrong to fast with mourning.

Jesus was a joyous person. His sinless human nature radiated joy. He loved people and cared about them, and they knew it. And even though His holiness made people aware of their sin, He was there to forgive their sin. Furthermore, He was truth, without a hint of deception. He was power, too. Perhaps the leper and the paralytic were able to make the party. He freed people from guilt and bondage to sin. And He gave people hope.

And all those people whose lives He touched became important to Him. He valued these relationships. It must have been a joy to listen to formerly blind men tell others what it was like to see. It was a joy to hear suffering women talk about how great it was not to suffer any more. It was joyous to watch the ex-leper eat and drink with friends. And I think would have been totally cool to watch the paralyzed guy demonstrate walking.

Try telling **these** people that life wasn't joyous because of Jesus.

They understood it was time to feast and be glad.

They had no doubts about that.

Now, the time would come when they would all fast, and Jesus makes that clear in verse 35, "*Someday he will be taken away from them, and then they will fast.*" The cross was still in their future. Jesus would be taken from them for a short time, and they would mourn, and they would be sorrowful, and they would hurt. But it would be **the right time** to mourn and be sad.

But not now.

Now is the time to share good news with good friends.

Jesus doesn't want you to miss that.

Then He illustrates His answer with two quick stories, and He does this to let them know that ...

**v. 36-39: CHANGE is more important.**

Luke writes in verse 36, "*Then Jesus gave them this illustration: "No one tears a*

*piece of cloth from a new garment and uses it to patch an old garment. For then the new garment would be torn, and the patch wouldn't even match the old garment."*

Who is Jesus talking to here?

The religious leaders.

What do you think He is talking about?

Their brand of religion.

He is telling them that their rules-laden version of Judaism had become an old, worn-out garment. It couldn't just be patched up with a few things taken from the Gospel of Christ. It doesn't work that way. The message that Christ brings needs a whole new structure to support it. And that structure is grace, not law. Jesus is coming to free people from bondage, not to replace their bondage to sin with bondage to rules.

And just in case they didn't understand, He gave them a second illustration. He said, *"And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. The new wine would burst the old skins, spilling the wine and ruining the skins. [38] **New wine must be put into new wineskins.**"*

In ancient cultures the skins of goats were stripped off as nearly whole as possible and then partly tanned and sewed up to make a wineskin. Then the new wineskin would be filled with new wine. The natural elasticity and strength of the new wineskins would allow the fermenting wine to expand. But if you put the new wine into an old wineskin that was brittle and inflexible, there would be no room for the fermenting wine to expand and it would burst the skin, and then both the wine and the wineskin would be lost.

Again Jesus is telling them what He is bringing is new. It is the new wine. However, they, the religious leaders, represent the old, legalistic religion ... the old wineskin. And new wine, the Gospel of Christ, needs a new wineskin ... it needs a faith based on grace, not one based on laws and traditions.

And just what is this new religion?

Just what are people supposed to change to?

The Gospel of God's Grace as it's found in Jesus Christ.

The Good News of New Life in Jesus Christ.

You see, when Christ fills our lives, the Bible says we become **new**.

**2 Corinthians 5:17** says just that. *"What this means is that those who become Christians become **new persons**. They are not the same anymore, for the old life is gone. A new life has begun!"*

The NIV says, *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, **he is a new creation**..."*

**Galatians 2:20** says, *"I myself no longer live, but **Christ lives in me**. So I live my life in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."*

Christ lives in you. He takes up residence in your heart by the power of the Holy Spirit. He establishes a permanent relationship with you that is real and personal. Now He's saying not just that relationships are important, but that His relationship **with you** is important.

This is all possible because you've been changed. You're new.

And Christ fills your life with His presence, so that, like new wine, it keeps expanding beyond anything you thought possible. It pushes out the unnecessary stuff and the unneeded stuff, your old idols and habits and sin patterns, and you begin this life-long process of changing and becoming more like Christ.

The Bible says in **Romans 8:29** that *"those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers."* (NIV)

We're not just made new for newness' sake, we're made new to begin the process of becoming like Christ. And that process doesn't happen in a vacuum, but it happens **in relationship** with Christ. He is the One who leads, changes, guides, and directs us, through the Holy Spirit, to become like Him.

**1 John 3:1-2** says very much the same thing, *"See how very much our heavenly Father loves us, for He allows us to be called His children, and we really are! But the people who belong to this world don't know God, so they don't understand that we are His children. [2] Yes, dear friends, we are already God's children, and we can't even imagine what we will be like when Christ returns. But we do know that when He comes we will be like Him, for we will see Him as He really is."*

And so what have we learned from this?

Well, we've learned that Appearances are not all that important in God's economy. You don't have to live up to everyone else's expectations. You don't have to dress, talk, or act like everyone else. You can be authentic. There's a lot of pressure on people to pretend everything's fine when it's not.

And you know something?

It's okay to admit that everything's not fine.

But it's just ingrained in some of us to keep up appearances.

And we do that in the church as well as anyone.

We want to look like we're spiritual even when our spiritual life is in the tank. So we pretend that we've got it together. We act like we're some kind of heroic prayer warriors even when we're wondering if God is even listening to us.

We draw on Bible knowledge we learned long ago because we haven't spent any time in God's Word lately.

But we don't want anyone to know that we're struggling so we wing it.

But you know something?

I think God is more glorified in honest struggling than in phony spirituality.

God would much prefer someone who says, *“I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”* than someone who refuses to admit his or her doubts and thinks they know how things are supposed to be.

God is more pleased with Levi than with the Pharisee.

And the church today has way too many Pharisees and not near enough Levi's. And we can be Pharisees about our old wineskins.

And sometimes we can be Pharisees about our new wineskins.

And we get ringside seats to the battle between ...

### **APPLICATION: The Tyranny of the Old versus The Tyranny of the New**

In verse 39, Jesus says, *“But no one who drinks the old wine seems to want the fresh and the new. 'The old is better,' they say.”*

Now that was a verbal uppercut to the Pharisees.

He's telling them that they are so stuck on the old way of doing things that they won't even try the new. They say, “The old is better,” but they don't really know because they won't try the new.

And it didn't just happen in Jesus' day.

It probably happens a lot more today.

Just pick any hot topic in the church.

What Bible version should I use?

An old one or a new one?

We can spend hours talking about that, but for most people here we're just arguing about preferences.

Or how about something really important?

Should we sing hymns or praise songs?

Churches have split over that stuff, but most of the arguments are not Biblical arguments, they're preferences.

I know people who won't read anything written in the last 50 years because they consider it too shallow and superficial.

And I know people who only read new stuff because they are sick and tired of all that old boring junk that doesn't work.

### **They're both wrong.**

The Tyranny of the New is no better than the Tyranny of the Old.

It's still Tyranny.

Some of the old writers, old preachers, old hymns, and old translations are wonderful. And you impoverish yourself if you ignore them.

And some of the new writers and new songs and new translations are eye opening and refreshing and enlightening. And it's **foolish** to write them off just because they're new.

One of the doctrines we hold dear in this church is that only God can bind the conscience. The elders can't, I can't, and you can't. Only God can. So I can

stand up here and say, “You should not commit adultery” because I can open the Bible and point to it. God said it. **He** is binding your conscience on that point.

However, I cannot stand up here and say “You can only use my version of the Bible” because I can’t back that up Biblically. And so those would be **my** words binding your conscience, and that’s wrong.

Have I done it?

Sure ... I’m just as big a sinner as you are ... maybe even bigger.

You ever wonder why Jesus got so upset with the Pharisees?

Because they were masters at binding people’s conscience with things that you couldn’t back up from the Bible.

“You have to fast twice a week.” Bible doesn’t say that.

“You can’t help someone else on the Sabbath.” Bible doesn’t say that.

“You can’t dance, smoke, drink or go with girls that do.”

Bible doesn’t say that.

We make up our own rules for other people all the time. Sometimes they’re old rules and sometimes they’re new rules. But either way, they’re not God’s rules. And we just become Pharisees looking in on Jesus’ party wondering, “How dare they have such a good time?”

Remember, Jesus didn’t come to make bad people good.

He came to make dead people live.

And Levi celebrated that good news by throwing a party, and he invited the great physician to come. Because Jesus said, *“Healthy people don’t need a doctor—sick people do. **I have come to call sinners to turn from their sins, not to spend My time with those who think they are already good enough.**”*

God still gives sinners an incredible offer. You can have love, acceptance, and forgiveness and the presence of Christ in your life. It will bring about a process of increasing joy and a satisfied soul.

And the condition?

You just have to believe that He is who He said He is and He does what He says He does ... for you personally. You must realize that your old life is simply not adequate. Your brand of tyranny, old or new, needs to be discarded. And you must accept that Christ is everything. He’s the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He is the presence of God in your life and the means of having a relationship that makes a difference. He is the bridegroom and the source of joy and love for the rest of your life.

He can do that ... because He makes you new.

Luke wants us to see that the Jesus story is not only about Him, but also about us. These texts **reveal** God at work; and shows us how God **reveals His power** in order to call people who know they’re **not good enough** to “Come, be My disciple.” God takes people who are “outsiders,” **and who can’t get in on**

**their own**, and makes them “insiders” ... people who are involved **in a relationship** with the God of the universe. People who are called to live a life that looks to God because He has **poured out His grace** on those of us who realize that without Christ we’re just tax collectors and Pharisees, both of whom live by their own works, and don’t deserve anything Christ has to give them.

But that’s the essence of grace ... getting what you don’t deserve.

Luke is bringing us the same essential message of grace over and over again. We see it in Jesus’ teaching. We see it in Jesus’ healing miracles. We see it when He casts out demons. We see it with lepers and paralytics.

We see it when Jesus goes out for a walk, and runs into a tax collector.

We see it when Jesus talks to the Pharisees who are watching a party through the window.

It’s all grace ... that’s the message.

Luke tells the story of how **Jesus revealed that grace**, died to provide it, rose again to bestow it, and will return to establish its presence over all of creation. The church **must show** what **such grace looks like** ... starting by bringing that grace to those among us who are desperate to hear Christ’s words of invitation to come to the feast. “Come, by My disciple.”

And all those who willing to listen and follow can now say, “Amen.”