

## Threads of Hope Devotion 17

During our Threads of Hope devotions, we have looked at a lot of Scriptures that have to do with fabrics and sewing. I love how the Bible uses everyday items in teaching us spiritual concepts. The people mentioned in the Bible were real people doing normal activities. So, the Scripture, particularly Jesus in His teaching, says, “let’s take something you already know and use it to teach you truth.” That method of teaching helps us to understand, to remember and to recall the concept in our day-to-day lives.

Today, we’re going to look at two word-pictures of everyday items: clothes and wine, both of which would have been important in Bible times as they are today. We’re going to look at a parable of Jesus that is recorded in 3 of the 4 Gospels—Matthew, Mark and Luke. (Matthew 9:16-17; Mark 2:21-22; Luke 5:36-37) Keep in mind that when the Scripture says something again and again, it gives us a gauge of the importance that God puts on it. We will read about this idea from Matthew and then we’ll take the word-pictures one at a time.

Matthew 9:16-17 “No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. Neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved.”

I think all thrifty mothers will patch clothes sometimes. I remember when I was in elementary school and I would fall and get a hole in the knees of my tights (because we wore dresses to school at that time), my mother would sew a patch on the hole. I can still feel that scratchiness of the iron-on patch that my mom had zig-zagged across multiple times so it would hold. When my two boys were little, I patched clothes all the time. My boys would wear out the knees on all their pants, just from good, hard play. No sooner would I send them off to school in the morning with new pants than they would walk back in the door in the afternoon with a hole in the knees. Eventually, I started patching all their new pants just to reinforce the knees and hopefully prevent a tear. I bought so many of those little iron-on patches, I was ready to buy stock in the company.

People in Bible times patched clothes, too. Probably more than we ever do. There was no going out to a store to buy new. And making new clothes took time. So, Jesus uses this contrast between old and new and gives us instructions about what happens when the old doesn't work anymore. He is saying, if you have a hole in an old garment, does it make sense to patch it with a new piece of cloth?

As seamstresses, we understand the importance of pre-shrinking a piece of fabric. If we don't pre-shrink the fabric, when we make the garment, then wash it, it won't turn out like we thought it would. The shrinkage will cause it to be a different size, or seams to pucker or pieces to bunch up. Here is the same concept. Sewing a new patch on old clothes and then laundering, will cause the patch to shrink and pull away from the tear, causing an even bigger hole.

The Apostle Luke uses an even stronger idea for this word-picture. Luke indicates that a seamstress wouldn't cut a patch from a brand-new garment to fix an old garment. Why would anyone do that? It would create a hole in the new clothing, thus ruining it, while trying to fix the old and not having that work either.

Is Jesus really that concerned with patching clothes? No. Remember, this is a parable. Jesus is saying, you had something that was new and beautiful once. It worked for you, but now it has a hole in it. It doesn't work anymore. What is that something? The Law.

The Law was a standard of living given to people in the Old Testament. It came from God and it was good. It showed people how God wanted them to live. But it wasn't an effective system to get rid of sin. It had a big hole, a tear, just like an old garment. The defect in the Law was that no one could live up to it. No one could keep the whole Law and please God in that way. So, God implemented a new system--grace. Grace was God giving us something we don't deserve. Grace came with the forgiveness offered when Jesus died on the cross to pay for our sins. God loved us enough to offer us grace.

What to do with the old system—the Law? Should we somehow use grace as a patch to try to cover up the holes in the Law and make it work? No. The Law is not the same system as grace, not the same garment, if you will. It's not going to be able to be patched. And we certainly wouldn't want to ruin the new garment of Grace by cutting it up or destroying it to use as patches for the Law.

We can find this same idea from the second word-picture in Jesus's parable. This time Jesus is using the idea of making and preserving wine. I didn't grow up in a wine-drinking family, so I don't have any great knowledge of the process of how grapes get to be wine. In my mind, when I read about making wine, I picture that classic "I Love Lucy" episode where Lucy and Ethel are barefoot in the wine vats stomping on the grapes. Do you know what I mean?

But there is a process of getting juice from grapes and then storing it for a length of time to allow it to ferment and become wine. It's a chemical reaction where the sugars in the grapes get converted to alcohol and carbon dioxide is released while the juice is stored and aged. In Bible times, this whole storage process involved receptacles known as wineskins.

Wineskins were literally bags that were made of the skins of animals. This sounds rather strange to us—how can a skin bag be made impervious enough to contain liquid?—but again, people in Bible times didn't hop on down to Target for a container or send away for wine-storage supplies on Amazon. They used what they had. And skin bags were perfect for fermenting wine because they were stretchy enough to accommodate the pressure of the fermentation process and the release of the gas. Wineskins were able to expand.

So, back to what Jesus was saying: no one puts new wine (wine that needs to expand) into an old wineskin. Why not? Because an old wineskin had already stretched to its capacity. If you were to pour in more new juice and let it begin to ferment and give off carbon dioxide, the old, used wineskin would burst, like an over-filled balloon. Only a new wineskin could contain new wine.

Overlay the word-picture of the new wine onto the concepts of the Law and Grace that we just saw with the patches. The Law is an old wineskin. It served a purpose once. But with the introduction of grace, we see that the Law doesn't have the capacity—the elasticity, as it were—to contain the new system of Grace under Jesus Christ. The Law can't expand any more. Only Grace can expand to cover all our sin.

In 2 Corinthians 5:17, the Scripture says "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." God has given us Grace to do what the Law could never do—forgive our sin.

Grace allows us to have a new life and a new relationship with God. Trying to mix together an arrangement of the Law AND Grace would be like patching an old garment with a new patch or pouring new wine into a stiff, old wineskin. It won't work. The old garments and the old wineskins have lost their effectiveness. Jesus came to make all things new!

This month as you sew, think about these concepts of the old and the new. When you are pre-shrinking your fabric, stop to ponder Jesus's gift of grace, like new fabric that far exceeds an old, torn garment. If you are taking communion this month, remember that just like that new, expansive wine, Jesus took the cup as a symbol of offering his own blood in a new covenant for the forgiveness of sin.

Don't dwell on a patched and stiff system of trying to earn heaven by your own righteousness. Linger on the wonderful gift of God's grace. And then sew up some shorts and dresses that will carry that same Gospel message to boys and girls around the world.