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The Secret of God's Power

"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. 30 And their scribes and the Pharisees complained against His disciples, saying, "Why do You eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"

31 Jesus answered and said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. 32 I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." **Luke 5:29-32**

Lately I've been going through what is probably the trial of my life. Mostly my faith has been unshakable but at times, I'm sorry to say, I've come dangerously close to completely abandoning hope. It is in those darkest hours however, that I often feel the presence of God the most tangibly. The Holy Spirit gently (and sometimes not so gently) warns me I'm heading for trouble and when I'm crudely open with Him and talk straight, He comforts me. And boy, do I let it hang out; bitterness, frustration, pain, even anger at Him. I think He understands that, and dare I say encourages me to be honest.

You see, at that point we're having a relationship. And God is all about relationship. From the beginning, God said let US make man in OUR image. The secret ingredient to the power of God is relationship. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit rely on Their relationship! They do nothing without each other. In the passage of scripture above, Jesus was rejecting the Pharisees when He said "I have not come to call the righteous". He knew their righteousness was as filthy rags, and He basically said "I don't have time for people who won't keep it real". God rejects the proud but embraces the humble. The religious leaders weren't interested in those people's wellbeing, they were interested in their law; in their own justification. Although the law is holy, there is no relationship in the law.

Often, we have a very strange notion of God. We seem to think He is just like us. We reason, since He is righteous and holy, His focal point is our righteousness. And in one way it is. He wants us walking free of sin, but righteousness is not a prerequisite for salvation (crazy how we think, huh?). Relationship IS a prerequisite however. We have to come to God and begin an honest dialogue with Him. And this open communication is necessary throughout our relationship with Him.

I suppose we have a skewed notion of grace because our fleshly nature senses our spiritual desire to be righteous and holy and tries in its own strength to achieve that. The easiest way seems to be to condemn those around us who are weak at something we excel in. We judge them in that area. The problem with that is we automatically qualify ourselves to be compared to God (since God and I are peers as judges now, right?). That, my friend, is a terrifying thought. I love what Jesus said though, to these religious leaders who were not only not taking responsibility for the very people that should have been under their care, but condemning them on top of it. As is His hallmark, He responds in love and explains it to them:

"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?" 34 And He said to them, "Can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? 35 But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them; then they will fast in those days." Luke 5:33-35

I believe Jesus is trying to make the religious leaders jealous here. In one sentence, He tells them "Man, we're having a (holy) bachelor's party over here! You expect us to FAST?" At the same time He is telling them that He is "The Bridegroom", "Messiah", the one they have been searching for all their lives in scripture. In that one line, He was inviting

them to join the party; to begin a relationship with Him. Why would He have taken the time with them, if He didn't hope they would respond and join Him? And some of them did.

Now Jesus, being the master surgeon of men and women's hearts, has a very deliberate purpose in chilling with sinners. Never forget that He is entirely God, entirely holy and one with the Father. Jesus is almighty God. So why does He have a big ol' BBQ with what probably would be a bunch of insurance auditors by today's standards (no offense you guys)? The answer lies in the parable He shares with the Pharisees:

"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. 37 And 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. 38 But new wine must be put into new wineskins, and both are preserved. 39 And no one, having drunk old wine, immediately desires new; for he says, 'The old is better.'" Luke 5:36-39

What Jesus is telling them is that He is rolling up His sleeves, getting down in the mud and working with His precious creation to transform us to a point where He can fill us with His Spirit. You see, He is the Great Light. We didn't have a clue until He came and hung out with us, laughed with us, cried with us, and died for us paying the price to raise us from the dead. He showed us how to live. That is why history turns at His arrival. He came to show us how to have a relationship with Him, and He did it not by condescending, but through demonstrating His relationship with His Father. He transforms us into new wineskins because without transformation, His power in us would simply be too strong and we wouldn't be able to bear it.

I absolutely love what He says in verse 39: "And no one, having drunk old wine, immediately desires new; for he says, 'The old is better." He is literally saying "I have to get you guys used to how wonderful God is. I have to spend time with you! You're so used to your nasty own ways, you think God's ways don't taste good! So I'm going to come and we'll hang out as buddies, and we'll see if you don't like this new stuff I'm drinking!" He was ALL about relationship. He was investing. And He still is.

I encourage you today, if you're struggling to let go of some offense, some addiction, or perhaps someone shattered your heart; if life seems unfair or you seem to be stuck in a parched desert, just be honest with Him. Keep it real with Him. Ditch the piety, works and religion and just rekindle your relationship. He's always there and will meet you at your level. He will come through with whatever you need, if you're patient! Take a time-out and prepare a meal, and invite Him to sit and talk with you. Literally. Just you and Jesus. You don't have to discipline yourself to stay awake and travail in prayer for two hours at six in the morning... you need to have dinner with your Friend. And let it grow from there. If you remain honest, and tell Him where you're struggling, and get your behind out of the judge's seat, He will help you overcome whatever it is you're struggling with. Every time! He's your FRIEND! He's there for you! Treat Him like it. I'm your friend too! Have a wonderful week in the Holy Spirit!

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