

CONCERNING THE WAY

January 24, 2012

LESSON 126: THE GOSPEL OF LUKE



Chapter 5

In this chapter Luke tells us about the calling of a few of Jesus' disciples. Then we're told of a couple of very significant healings.

Luke 5:1-3 One day as the crowd was pressing in on him to listen to God's word, Jesus was standing by the lake of Gennesaret. (2) He saw two boats lying on the shore, but the fishermen had stepped out of them and were washing their nets. (3) So Jesus got into one of the boats (the one that belonged to Simon) and asked him to push out a little from the shore. Then he sat down and began to teach the crowds from the boat.

- This famous body of water in Galilee is also called the Sea of Galilee and the Sea of Tiberias. It is thirteen miles long by eight miles wide, and is 680 feet below sea level, so it has an almost tropical climate. Nowadays it is not very populous but in the days of Jesus it had nine townships clustered round its shores, none of fewer than 15,000 people.
- As we saw in the last chapter, Jesus had become very popular. Why was He so popular, according to this passage?
- There were so many people that it was difficult for Jesus to speak to all of them at once. So he got into a boat, which happened to be Simon Peter's boat, and taught the crowds from the boat.

Luke 5:4-7 When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "**Push out into deep water, and lower your nets for a catch.**" (5) Simon answered, "Master, we have worked hard all night and caught nothing. But if you say so, I'll lower the nets." (6) After the men had done this, they caught so many fish that the nets began to tear. (7) So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. They came and filled both boats until the boats began to sink.

- This is an expression of faith by Peter – he obeyed Jesus even though humanly speaking it didn't make sense to him to lower the nets again.
- Simon's partners in the other boat were James and John, as you'll see in the next verses.

Luke 5:8-11 When Simon Peter saw this, he fell down at Jesus' knees and said, "Leave me, Lord! I am a sinful man!" (9) For Simon and all the people who were with him were amazed at the number of fish they had caught, (10) and so were James and John, Zebedee's sons and Simon's partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, "**Stop being afraid. From now on you will be catching people.**" (11) So when they brought the boats to shore, they left everything and followed Jesus.

- Matthew tells us in his gospel (Matt. 4:18) that Peter's brother Andrew was one of the men on the boat

that left fishing behind and followed Jesus. So He calls four of the eventual twelve disciples here.

- This event is obviously not the first time Jesus had been in contact with Andrew and Simon Peter. Luke already has told us that Jesus had healed Peter's mother-in-law, and John tells us of the first time Andrew saw Jesus (John 1:35-40). Andrew was originally one of John the Baptist's disciples.
- Although they were occasionally with Him as He traveled around Galilee, they must have still continued to operate their fishermen's business part time as well (see Matthew 4:18-20). But this time, they "left everything" to go with Him (verse 11). Luke's record, of course, is not always chronological, but topical.
- Read John 1:35-51 to see how Jesus called some of the other disciples.

John 1:35-51 The next day John was standing there again with two of his disciples. (36) As he watched Jesus walk by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" (37) When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. (38) But when Jesus turned around and saw them following, he said to them, "**What are you looking for?**" They said to him, "Rabbi," (which is translated "Teacher"), "where are you staying?" (39) He told them, "**Come, and you will see.**" So they went and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. (40) Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard John and followed Jesus. (41) Andrew first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated "Christ"). (42) He led Simon to Jesus. Jesus looked at him intently and said, "**You are Simon, the son of John. You will be called Cephas**" (which is translated "Peter"). (43) The next day Jesus decided to go away into Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "**Follow me.**" (44) Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the hometown of Andrew and Peter. (45) Philip found Nathaniel and told him, "We have found the man about whom Moses in the Law and the Prophets wrote-Jesus, the son of Joseph, from Nazareth." (46) Nathaniel said to him, "Out of Nazareth? What good can that be?" Philip told him, "Come and see!" (47) Jesus saw Nathaniel coming toward him and said about him, "**Look, a true Israelite, in whom there is no falsehood!**" (48) Nathaniel said to him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered him, "**Before Philip called you, while you were under the fig tree, I saw you.**" (49) Nathaniel replied to him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" (50) Jesus said to him, "**Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than that.**" (51) Then he said to him, "**Truly, truly I tell all of you, you will see heaven standing open and the angels of God going up and coming down to the Son of Man.**"

So now we have James and John, Andrew and Peter, Phillip and Nathaniel. There are six apostles so far. Now back to Luke:

Luke 5:12-14 One day while Jesus was in one of the cities, a man covered with leprosy saw Jesus and fell on his face, begging him, "Lord, if you want to, you can make me clean." (13) So Jesus reached out his hand and touched him, saying, "**I do want to. Be made clean!**" Instantly the leprosy left him. (14) Then Jesus ordered him, "**Don't tell anyone. Instead, go and show yourself to the priest and make an offering for your cleansing as Moses commanded as proof to the authorities.**"

- Jesus touches the untouchable. We must understand what a big deal it was for Jesus to even touch this man. In Israel there were mainly two kinds of leprosy. There was one which was like a very bad skin disease, and it was the less serious of the two. Then there was one where the disease, starting from a

small spot, ate away the flesh until the afflicted person was left with only the stump of a hand or a leg. It was literally a living death.

- The regulations concerning leprosy are in Leviticus 13-14. The most terrible thing about it was the isolation. The leper was to shout "Unclean! Unclean!" wherever he went; he was to live alone; "in a habitation outside the camp" (Leviticus 13:45-46). He was banished from society and exiled from his home. The psychological consequences of leprosy were as bad as the physical.
- Dr. A. B. MacDonald, in an article on the leper colony in Nigeria he was in charge of, wrote, "The leper is sick in mind as well as body. For some reason there is an attitude to leprosy different from the attitude to any other disfiguring disease. It is associated with shame and horror, and carries, in some mysterious way, a sense of guilt, although innocently acquired like most contagious troubles. Shunned and despised, frequently do lepers consider taking their own lives and some do."
- Why did Jesus command him not to tell anyone? (a) Jesus wanted the man to go immediately to the priest to tell him a miracle had been done. (b) When the news of Jesus' healing power spread, He was constantly besieged by people, which caused Him to withdraw (next verses, 15-16).

Luke 5:15-16 But the news about Jesus spread even more, and many crowds began gathering to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. (16) However, he continued his habit of retiring to deserted places and praying.

- This habit of Jesus is a good example for us. When we get overwhelmed by life, or just tired from our daily routine, we need to find a place where we can be alone and rest and pray. Like Jesus, there is refreshing and renewal that comes from the Father that we can get nowhere else.

Luke 5:17-20 One day as Jesus was teaching, some Pharisees and teachers of the law happened to be sitting near by. The people had come from every village in Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem. The power of the Lord was present to heal them. 18 Some men were bringing a paralyzed man on a stretcher. They were trying to take him into the house and place him in front of Jesus. 19 When they couldn't find a way to get him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down on his stretcher through the tiles into the middle of the room, right in front of Jesus. 20 When Jesus saw their faith, he said, **"Man, your sins are forgiven."**

- Here we have a story that many of us remember from our children's Bible story books. Jesus was in a house teaching. Houses in those days were flat-roofed. The roof had only a slight tilt, enough to make the rain water run off. The roof was made of wood beams laid from wall to wall and a short distance apart. The space between the beams was filled with close packed twigs, compacted together with mortar. It would have been easy to take out the packing between two beams. In fact coffins were often taken in and out of a house by the roof.

Luke 5:21-25 The scribes and the Pharisees began to argue among themselves, saying, **"Who is this man who is uttering blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"** (22) Because Jesus knew that they were arguing, he said to them, **"Why are you arguing about this among yourselves? (23) Which is easier: to say 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say 'Get up and walk'? (24) But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins."** Then he said to the paralyzed man, **"I say to you: Get up, pick up**

your stretcher, and go home!" (25) So the man immediately stood up in front of them and picked up what he had been lying on. Then he went home, praising God.

- What does the passage about forgiving sins mean? We must remember that sin and suffering were inseparable in that culture. It was believed that if a person was suffering they had sinned. That is why Jesus began by telling the man that his sins were forgiven. Without that the man would never believe that he could be cured. This shows how the scribes and Pharisees were completely defeated. They objected to Jesus claiming to give forgiveness to the man. But by their own arguments and assumptions the man was paralyzed because he had sinned; and if he was cured that was proof that his sins were forgiven. So the complaint of the Pharisees backfired on them and left them speechless.
- The wonderful thing is that here is a man who was saved by the faith of his friends. When Jesus saw their faith--the faith of those who stopped at nothing to bring their friend to Jesus, he rewarded that faith by curing their friend.
- Again notice there is no slow recovery here. The healing is complete and instantaneous. He gets right up and goes home.

Luke 5:26-28 Amazement seized all the people, and they began to praise God. They were filled with fear and declared, "We have seen wonderful things today!" (27) After that, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector named Levi sitting at the tax collector's desk. He said to him, "Follow me!" (28) So Levi left everything behind, got up, and followed him.

- Here we have the call of another disciple, Matthew, also called Levi. Of all people in Israel the tax-collectors were the most hated. They were a country subject to the Romans; tax-collectors were working for the Roman government; so they were regarded as traitors.
- The taxation system was open to abuse. The Roman custom had been to outsource the collection of taxes. They assessed a district at a certain amount and then sold the right to collect that figure to the highest bidder. So long as the collector paid that amount at the end of the year he could keep whatever else he could get from the people; and since there was no mass communication, the common people had no real idea of what they had to pay.
- There were all kinds of taxes. There was a tax which all men from 14 to 65, and all women from 12 to 65, had to pay just because they existed. There was a ground tax which was one-tenth of all grain grown, and one-fifth of wine and oil. There was also income tax, which was one per cent of a man's income.
- Then there were all kinds of duties. A tax was payable for using the main roads, the harbors, and the markets. A tax was payable on a cart, on each wheel of it, and on the animal which pulled it. There was purchase tax on certain things, and there were import and export duties. A tax-collector could make a man stop on the road and unpack his bags and charge him pretty much anything he liked. If a man could not pay, sometimes the tax-collector would offer to lend him money at a ridiculous rate of interest and so get him further into his debt.
- Robbers, murderers and tax-collectors were classed together. A tax-collector was barred from the synagogue. Yet Jesus chose Matthew the tax-collector to be an apostle.

- The call of Matthew was the culmination of the previous two miracles. Jesus had shown that He had the authority to make a person ceremonially clean and to forgive sins. Now those two facts were used as a basis for choosing this man.

Luke 5:29-32 Then Levi gave a large banquet at his home for Jesus. A large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. (30) The Pharisees and their scribes started complaining to Jesus' disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" (31) But Jesus answered them, "Healthy people don't need a physician, but sick people do. (32) I have not come to call righteous people, but sinners, to repentance."

- The first thing Matthew did was to invite Jesus to a feast (he could afford it) - and to invite his fellow tax-collectors and their outcast friends to meet him. Matthew's first instinct was to share what he had found in Jesus.
- A party thrown by a wealthy person then could last a long time, with the invited guests hanging around for a week or so. People who weren't invited often would look into the wealthy person's windows to watch enviously what was going on. The Pharisees obviously weren't invited, but were watching through the windows and criticizing.
- The scribes and Pharisees did not approve. The Pharisees would not even let the skirt of their robe touch someone like Matthew. Jesus made the perfect answer. He pointed out that it is only sick people who need doctors; and people like Matthew and his friends were the very people who needed him most. It is a lesson for us to think of the sinner not as a criminal but as a sick man; and to look on the man who has made a mistake as someone needing love and help to find the right way.

Luke 5:33-35 Then they said to him, "John's disciples frequently fast and pray, and so do those of the Pharisees. But your disciples keep right on eating and drinking." (34) But Jesus said to them, "You can't force the wedding guests to fast while the groom is still with them, can you? (35) But the days will come when the groom will be taken away from them, and in those days they will fast."

- Their religious observances had become routines. They fasted on Mondays and Thursdays; and often they whitened their faces to try to impress people that they were fasting. Fasting was not so difficult because it lasted only from sunrise to sunset and after that ordinary food could be eaten. The idea was to call God's attention to the faster (Oh, God, look at me, I'm sacrificing for you!). By fasting a man was basically offering his own flesh to God. Even prayer was routine. Prayer was to be offered at 12 midday, 3 p.m. and 6 p.m.
- Jesus was radically opposed to religion. He used a picture of a wedding to make a point. When two young people married in Israel they did not go away for a honeymoon; they stayed at home, and for a week had an open house. They dressed in their best; sometimes they even wore crowns; for that week they were king and queen and their word was law. They would never have a week like that again in their hard lives. And the chosen guests who shared this festive week were called the children of the bride-chamber.

- It is extremely significant that more than once Jesus likened the Christian life to a wedding feast. Joy is a primary Christian characteristic. Too many people think of Christianity as something which forces them to do all the things they do not want to do and keeps them from doing all the things they do want to do. If you're a Christian, you should never be walking around like you lost your best friend, you have joy and a hope that can never be taken away!
- Jesus is calling Himself a groom here. There are other references in the New Testament to this wedding metaphor (Matthew 25:1-13). John the Baptist uses it in John 3:29, and John the apostle makes reference to it several times in Revelation (19:7, 21:2, 21:9, 22:17). The Church is considered the Bride of Christ. As Jesus says here, the groom will go back to the Father, and that is the situation we're living in now. Jesus is right now in heaven, sitting at the right hand of the Father. But we wait for the groom to come get us, His bride, and take us to His home to live with Him forever.

Luke 5:36-39 Then he told them a parable: "No one tears a piece of cloth from a new garment and sews it on an old garment. If he does, the new will tear, and the piece from the new will not match the old. (37) And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will make the skins burst, the wine will be spilled, and the skins will be ruined. (38) Rather, new wine is to be poured into fresh wineskins. (39) No one who has been drinking old wine wants new wine, for he says, 'The old is excellent!'"

- Jesus' response was that the new way (His way) and the old way (the way of John and the Pharisees) just do not mix. He gave three examples.
 - A bridegroom's guests do not fast while he is with them because it is a joyous occasion. They fast later after he is gone.
 - A new unshrunk patch of cloth is not put on an old garment because it will shrink and the tear will be worse.
 - New wine is not put into old wineskins because as it ferments it will break the old skins, which have lost their elasticity, and both the wine and the skins will be ruined.
- In each case two things do not mix: a time of feasting and a time of fasting (vv. 34-35), a new patch and an old garment (v. 36), and new wine and old wineskins (vv. 37-38). Jesus was saying that His way and the way of the Pharisees are incompatible. The Pharisees would refuse to try the new way because they liked their old way and didn't want it to change. Jesus' teaching was considered by the Pharisees and religious leaders to be like new wine, and they wanted no part in it (v. 39).