

The Book of Luke — Chapter 5

Background:

Luke is the first of two books addressed to a man named Theophilus (Acts 1:1–3).

Apparently, Luke was a Gentile convert and the only non-Jewish author of a book in the Bible. The Holy Spirit prompted him to write to Theophilus, whose name means “one who loves God,” to fill a need in the Gentile church for a full account of the beginning of Christianity.

Matthew wrote initially for the Jews, and Mark wrote a concise Gospel for the church in Rome. The Greek-speaking world would have accounts about Jesus by eyewitnesses, as well as short written digests, but no orderly and complete Gospel.

Luke gives the most complete and narrative account of Jesus and gives the only glimpse into the Gospel's “before Jesus” background.

Because truth was important to Luke, he relied heavily on eyewitness accounts.

The Bible encourages us to investigate its claims thoroughly (John 1:46; 21:24; Acts 17:11–12).

5:1–6 — Formation of a New Community

This section begins with Jesus calling His first disciples (5:1–6) and ends with the formation of God's restored people, centered on Jesus' twelve apostles (6:12).

Jesus Calls His First Disciples

Luke 5:1-11 KJV

[1] And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret, [2] and saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets. [3] And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship. [4] Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught. [5] And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net. [6] And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake. [7] And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink. [8] When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord. [9] For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken: [10] and so was also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men. [11] And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him.

After establishing His authority and proclaiming that a new era of God's salvation had arrived, Jesus begins to form His own community of disciples.

This account shows critical elements of a proper response to encountering Jesus:

- Recognizing Jesus' authority and identity (vv. 1–8).
- Recognizing one's sinfulness in the presence of the Holy One (vv. 8–9).
- Leaving everything to follow Him (v. 11).

Along with Peter, James and John form the core group of Jesus' disciples (8:51; 9:28).

“Fish for People”

Unlike the act of fishing, where the goal is capturing and killing fish, these disciples are called to give life to people through the proclamation of the Gospel.

Those Who Follow Jesus Must Leave Everything

References: 5:12; 13; 14:26, 33; 18:22.

Jesus Heals a Man with Leprosy

This event shows that Jesus' mission is to call those whom the Jews viewed as unclean

Luke 5:12-15 KJV

[12] And it came to pass, when he was in a certain city, behold a man full of leprosy: who seeing Jesus fell on his face, and besought him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. [13] And he put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will: be thou clean. And immediately the leprosy departed from him. [14] And he charged him to tell no man: but go, and shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing, according as Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them. [15] But so much the more went there a fame abroad of him: and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities.

Lepers were considered unclean.

They were not allowed to come in contact with others or to worship in the Temple (Leviticus 13–14).

Verse 13: Jesus reached out His hand and touched the man: “Be clean!”

Jesus risked ceremonial uncleanness (Leviticus 13:45–46). This not only reflects Jesus' own power and authority but also allows the leper to rejoin the community of God's people.

Luke again uses this clean/unclean word group to refer to those excluded from God's people.

We should not call anyone impure or unclean whom God has made clean (Acts 10:15).

Verse 14: “Don't tell anyone.” Jesus probably does not want to be defined simply by His power to heal.

Prayer of Jesus

Luke 5:16 KJV

[16] And he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed.

Luke stresses more than the other Gospels the place of prayer in the work and life of Jesus:

Examples:

- When the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus at the Jordan, He was praying (3:21).
- Jesus withdrew from the multitudes “and prayed” (5:16).
- He “continued all night in prayer” before choosing the twelve disciples (6:12).
- He was alone praying before He asked His disciples an important question (9:18).
- At His Transfiguration, He climbed the mountain to pray (9:28).
- The actual Transfiguration occurred while He prayed (9:29).
- He was praying just before He taught the disciples the Lord's Prayer (22:44).
- His last words uttered before His death were a prayer.
- Luke also mentions that He prayed after His resurrection (24:30).
- Jesus Forgives and Heals a Paralyzed Man

Luke 5:17-26 KJV

[17] And it came to pass on a certain day, as he was teaching, that there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by, which were come out of every town of Galilee, and Judæa, and Jerusalem: and the power of the Lord was present to heal them. [18] And, behold, men brought in a bed a man which was taken with a palsy: and they sought means to bring him in, and to lay him before him. [19] And when they could not find by what way they might bring him in because of the multitude, they went upon the housetop, and let him down through the tiling with his couch into the midst before Jesus. [20] And when he saw their faith, he said unto him, Man, thy sins are forgiven thee. [21] And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, Who is this which speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone? [22] But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answering said unto them, What reason ye in your hearts? [23] Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk? [24] But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins, (he said unto the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house. [25] And immediately he rose up before them, and took up that whereon he lay, and departed to his own house, glorifying God. [26] And they were all amazed, and they glorified God, and were filled with fear, saying, We have seen strange things today.

As Jesus continues His healing ministry, He confronts the religious leaders. At issue is Jesus' status and identity.

Some who witnessed Jesus' powerful acts responded by praising God (vv. 25–26), while others whose influence was challenged by Jesus' popularity accused Him of blasphemy (v. 21).

Pharisees and Teachers of the Law:

Luke portrays them as those who opposed Jesus and His ministry.

Pharisees: In historical documents, they first appeared in the second century BC as a pious group that opposed the Hellenization of Judaism.

In the time of Jesus, they were recognized as religious leaders.

Theologically, they relied on oral traditions and affirmed the doctrines of:

- Predestination
- Resurrection
- The immortality of the soul

Sociologically, they were respected by the people of the land.

Politically, they were relatively conservative in their attempts to protect the customs of their ancestors.

Teachers of the Law

Those who studied and taught the Law (Luke 5:17).

They were often associated with the Pharisees, so both labels can apply to the same people (Acts 5:34).

Verse 18 — The Friends of the Paralyzed Man

The friends of the paralyzed man had strong faith that Jesus could heal him, for they were determined to present him to Jesus.

We, too, must have faith that can meet the needs of those we know, using every opportunity to bring them to Jesus.

God's Spirit will open up such opportunities for us if we desire to lead others to Christ.

Verse 19 — Roofs

Roofs of houses in the land of Israel were often covered with reeds, branches, and mud. Stairs to the roof were often outside the house.

Tiles were building materials used for the roofs of Hellenistic urban houses.

For the sake of Gentile readers, Luke may have used the term in reference to similar material found on roofs in the Holy Land.

It is also possible, however, that tiles were actually used in some well-built houses.

Verses 20–22 — Jesus Forgives Sin

Pharisees and Scribes' response: "Who speaks blasphemy?"

God is the only One who can forgive sins (Psalm 103:3; Isaiah 43:25; Micah 7:18).

In the Old Testament, sins could not be forgiven apart from the Temple system (Leviticus 4:22–5:16; 16:15–16).

Jesus' act not only represents His claim to replace the Temple cult but is also an implicit claim to divinity.

Jesus Perceived Their Thoughts

Every believer must be made aware that God knows and constantly evaluates their every thought, desire, and imagination.

References: Psalm 139; Matthew 12:25; John 4:18; 2:25; 21:17; Hebrews 4:13.

Verse 23–24 — “Which Is Easier?”

To forgive sins appears to be easier than to heal, but it is, in fact, more difficult because the authority to forgive belongs to God alone.

“Son of Man”

In the Old Testament, this is a title that can refer to human beings in general or a prophet in particular (Ezekiel 2:1; 3:3; 4:1).

In Daniel, it refers to a heavenly being who is worthy of all glory and honor (Daniel 7:13–14).

This usage points to a heavenly being surviving in Jewish literature during the time of Jesus. Elsewhere in Luke (21:27; 9:6; 22:69), this title echoes that of Daniel, which may explain why the title appears here when Jesus' authority is at issue.

Daniel used the title to describe a person he saw in a vision, one “like the Son of Man” coming with the clouds of heaven, who is given an everlasting kingdom.

Thus, Jesus expresses the truth that He is the predicted Messiah sent by God.

Jesus uses the term:

- As a substitute for “I” (Matthew 14:4).
- When making important claims (Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45).
- When foretelling His death on the cross (Matthew 9:44; Matthew 17:22; Mark 8:31).
- When speaking about His resurrection (Matthew 17:9).
- When referring to His glorious return to earth (Matthew 24:27; Mark 13:26; 14:62).
- When speaking of His role in judgment (Matthew 13:41).

Verses 27–32

[27] And after these things he went forth, and saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he said unto him, Follow me. [28] And he left all, rose up, and followed him. [29] And Levi made him a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them. [30] But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners? [31] And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. Luke 5:32 KJV

[32] I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

Jesus Calls Levi and Eats with Sinners

As in the healing of the man with leprosy (vv. 12–16), this narrative highlights Jesus' ministry among outcasts, as explicitly noted in the concluding saying (v. 32):

"I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

Verses 33–39 — Jesus Questioned About Fasting

Luke 5:33-39 KJV

[33] And they said unto him, Why do the disciples of John fast often, and make prayers, and likewise the disciples of the Pharisees; but thine eat and drink? [34] And he said unto them, Can ye make the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? [35] But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days. [36] And he spake also a parable unto them; No man putteth a piece of a new garment upon an old; if otherwise, then both the new maketh a rent, and the piece that was taken out of the new agreeth not with the old. [37] And no man putteth new wine into old bottles; else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish. [38] But new wine must be put into new bottles; and both are preserved. [39] No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new: for he saith, The old is better.

The Old Testament pointedly critiques those who observe the ritual of fasting even while rebelling against God (Isaiah 58:3–6).

In Jewish tradition, fasting often accompanies acts of **lamenting** (1 Samuel 31:13; 2 Samuel 1:12; 1 Chronicles 10:12) and **pleading** (Judges 20:26; 1 Samuel 7:6; Esther 4:3, 16; Daniel 9:3) to God in the midst of **suffering**.

Thus, fasting is an appropriate response in the presence of an eschatological wedding banquet. A new era has arrived and demands a proper response.

Verses 36–39 — The New and the Old

This parable emphasizes the discontinuity between the old age and the new age.

- The new age is brought about by God's decisive revelation in His Son, and it demands the full acceptance and obedience of His Son (18:22).

Verse 39 — "The Old Is Better"

The Jewish religious leaders claim this. They refuse to abandon their rules and customs and receive Jesus, the bearer of the new age of salvation.

This claim fails to recognize the establishment of the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31), in which the Law is now written "**on their hearts**" (Jeremiah 31:33).

Conclusion — "The Old Is Better"

Verse 39 is probably an ironic comment about the Jews who rejected the “new wine” of the Gospel and held on to the “old wine” of First-Century Judaism.

Christ suggests here that those who are accustomed to drinking fermented wine acquire a desire for it and do not want unfermented wine.

He recognizes the habit-forming and addictive effect of alcoholic beverages. It is not Jesus but the one who drinks the old wine who thinks “the old is better.”

We may not interpret this verse to state that the old wine—First-Century Judaism—is better than the new wine, Christ's Gospel, for this would invert the parable's meaning.

What Jesus is stating is that the Pharisees and their followers will not even recognize the merits of the new. They feel that “the old” is good enough.

The Pharisees prefer the rabbinical interpretation of the Law to the pure, new, sweet wine of the Gospel of Christ.

Final Observation

The Pharisees have no desire for the best wine. They refuse to accept the fresh, natural revelation of God and instead seek only what humans have altered.

Yet, for those who receive Jesus, the fresh new wine of the grape—the Gospel—is preferable to old fermented wine—Pharisaic religion.

This claim fails to recognize the establishment of the New Covenant, in which the Law is now written “on their hearts” (Jeremiah 31:33).

A New Covenant

Luke's teaching points toward the reality that God's work in Christ brought the fulfillment of His redemptive plan.

The prophets had anticipated a covenant in which God's law would be written upon the hearts of His people.

Teaching Principle

We must never become so attached to tradition that we fail to recognize the truth and work of God.

MAJOR PRINCIPLES FROM LUKE CHAPTER 5

1. FOLLOWING JESUS REQUIRES SURRENDER

The disciples left their former lives to follow Christ.

Life Application:

What may God be asking me to surrender so that I can follow Him more completely?

2. JESUS HAS AUTHORITY TO RESTORE

Jesus cleansed the leper and restored the excluded.

Life Application:

Do I continue to define myself—or others—by the past rather than by God's transforming work?

3. PRAYER MUST BE A PRIORITY

Jesus consistently withdrew to pray.

Life Application:

Am I making prayer a regular part of my life, especially before important decisions?

4. FAITH IS DEMONSTRATED BY ACTION

The friends of the paralyzed man refused to give up.

Life Application:

How far am I willing to go to help bring someone closer to Jesus?

5. JESUS CAME FOR THOSE WHO RECOGNIZE THEIR NEED

Jesus called sinners to repentance.

Life Application:

Are we reaching beyond our comfortable circles to bring others to Christ?

6. CHRIST REQUIRES A NEW RESPONSE

Jesus brought something greater than religious tradition.

Life Application:

Am I open to God's truth, even when it challenges my traditions, assumptions, and comfort zones?

CLOSING THOUGHT

Luke Chapter 5 presents Jesus as One with authority over people's lives, sickness, sin, and religious tradition.

- He calls ordinary people into an extraordinary purpose.
- He restores those who have been excluded.
- He forgives those burdened by sin.
- He demonstrates the importance of prayer.
- And He challenges us to receive the new life and new covenant that are found in Him.

The question for each of us is:

Will we merely observe Jesus, or will we leave what holds us back and truly follow Him?

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