

## Luke 5

Written by K B Napier  
Thursday, 21 March 2013 14:54

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As I say at the end of this chapter, I was once caught up in the stifling environment of traditional reformed theology. Then, The Holy Spirit suddenly gave me a glimpse of what was real – the freedom in Christ that both drove me to abandon the old and to enjoy the new, the true Gospel and its attendant truths. I am still ‘reformed’ in the sense of being a Bible-believer loyal to Christ – but I am not a blind slave following without question and being loyal to other men when they are in error.

Jesus was literally fresh-air in His day, and continues to be so for every man and woman born again and open to His voice. Most today *think* they are open, but they are not, as their beliefs constantly jar with truth. Jesus pointed this out to the Pharisees, but the same warning applies to many Christians today, who trundle the wide paths, refusing the narrow path created for them by the Lord.

### Verses 1-3

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.

Jesus was now fully into His mission to preach God's salvation to the Jews and his fame was everywhere. He could go nowhere without crowds pushing and jostling to hear Him, though many only wanted what He could give them – healings and casting out of demons.

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This is not unlike today, when Christians want all the benefits of being saved, without bothering to live the life of faith. Instead, they fill their days with supposed service – attending meetings, going to the unbiblical regular prayer meetings, and so on, thinking that these inventions of men are the ‘real thing’, when they are not. Even the best of local churches fall to these many side issues and false means of devotion.

On this occasion, the more sincere in the crowds were waiting to hear Jesus speak truth. Jesus had His back to Lake Gennesaret (‘a harp’: also known as Lake Galilee or Lake Tiberius. Luke used the earlier name for Galilee, rooted in *Kinnerowth*, or Chinneroth) and the crowd kept pressing forward. So, seeing two fishing vessels near the shore, Jesus went into one of them, intending to speak from there. One ship belonged to Peter and the other to a colleague. They and their crews were cleaning the nets on shore. Jesus asked Peter to row him just a little way off shore. He then sat down and started to teach the people.

I find it humorous that so many preachers think we ought to teach standing up. Why? Even Jesus taught sitting down! Not always, but some of the time. I have even taught while strolling around a church... at least the congregation listened! I have taught sitting down for the past 27 years, and there have been no disasters!

Jesus finished speaking. We should note that Jesus never filled an hour, or a specific time, unlike today’s preachers who slavishly extend or shorten what they say to fit the dinner-time needs of their hearers, who would otherwise keep looking at their watches! It is a sad reflection on those who attend churches to hear the word of God... their hunger for food, or TV programmes, or to just go home, is far greater than their hunger for truth. Obviously, not everyone, but enough for me to make a general observation. On the other hand, as many preachers and teachers are not called by God to their task, what they say is without inspiration and powerless. So it is not surprising if their hearers switch off or wish to go home.

Jesus spoke for as long as was needed. There was no formula. In my first few years preaching I sincerely tried to apply what is known as the ‘Geneva Pulpit’ method, where there were three topics in the sermon and no more. Thus, like so many other reformed preachers, my preaching conformed to subject matter, time and delivery. How boring! But, God shook me to my very core and I stopped doing this. I had never been my church’s favourite person, but now I excelled myself in my move away from tradition, ‘proving’ just how backslidden I must be. Oh dear.

### Verses 4-11

1.

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Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught.

2.

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.

3.

And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake.

4.

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.

5.

When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.

6.

For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken:

7.

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.

8.

And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him.

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At the end of His preaching, Jesus commanded Peter to row the boat out to the deepest part of the Lake, which was 700 feet, and to drop his nets for a catch. Peter said he and his colleagues had already been doing that for the entire night, but had caught nothing. He added that he would do so because Jesus had told him to do it.

How many of us 'believe' Jesus and what He says and yet make excuses for unbelief? I would say *all* of us at some time or another. Peter had heard the power of Jesus' teaching and had witnessed His miracles. Yet, before he agreed to do what Jesus commanded, he still had to insert a note of defeat and unbelief: 'Okay, I will do it – but we have tried that all night and nothing happened!' He even called Jesus 'Master', *epistates*, in recognition of His superiority... but it was a feeble recognition, for if he had total trust he would not have added his words of defeat.

Most Christians are afraid to obey, because that would mean they trust God. And they are afraid to do that just in case God does not give results and so demolish their tottering faith. Is this not the case? I know it is. It is why we are all so weak and timid, and why we see relatively nothing coming from God. The answer is just to do whatever God says we must do, without questioning the command. It shows us that whatever the odds against us, if God is with us, nobody can be against us!

No sooner had Peter let down his net, than it was filled with fish, so many that the net began to break. Peter called out for the others to help, and so both ships were filled to the brim with the catch, almost causing the two boats to sink. God never gives in small amounts – whatever He gives is always full and overflowing.

Some think this is not a miracle, because these were fishermen and they were on a lake with fish. But, it was a miracle. It is so because Jesus told Peter exactly where to fish, in anticipation of a good catch, and when the net was thrown there was an immediate result where there was none during the hours just before. Miracles are divine interventions, and many use ordinary things in life. It is the timing, the command, and the instant result that makes them miracles. (See my book on miracles).

Peter and the others were astonished (why?) by this amazing miracle, and Peter fell to his knees before Jesus: *"Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord."* He immediately saw how sinful his reasoning was, and now wished to repent of it. His reaction was proper in the face of Almighty God sitting in the ship. He saw that he did not deserve to have Jesus with him. This is

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how we all should speak to the Lord, though we should also realise that God will not leave the genuine repentant, but will give him everything. We are nothing, and yet God makes us His children, through Christ! For this we should be eternally thankful, showing it in our daily lives.

Peter's colleagues in the other ship were James and John, the famed 'sons of Zebedee'. They were in awe of what Jesus had done that day. When Peter had finished before Jesus, Jesus gave him a significant message: "*Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men.*" No doubt Peter did not, at that moment, understand what Jesus meant.

It is from that time that Jesus called him and his friends to follow Him full-time, leaving their living to be disciples. Jesus used the incident as an indication of things to come – Peter used to catch fish, but now he would catch men, via the Gospel. When both ships reached dry land "*they forsook all, and followed him.*"

No matter what our means of living are in this life, we are to put God first, not our own pursuits. Otherwise, what we choose as our living dominates our time and effort, pushing God to the periphery, to take up a little bit of our efforts, 'if we have time'. To my shame, I have personally missed a variety of opportunities in the past to follow the Lord's will, and know that they have gone forever. Thus, I did not do what I should have done. When the time is past, it cannot be recaptured. The disciples "forsook all"!

### Verses 12-16

1.

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.

2.

And he put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will: be thou clean. And immediately the leprosy departed from him.

3.

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.

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4.

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.

5.

And he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed.

A while later (we do not know when or where) Jesus was in a “*certain city*”, where a man with leprosy saw Him. He appears to have known Who Jesus was, for he threw himself face down to the ground, calling out for mercy:

*“Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean”*

. He knew Jesus could heal, but did not know if He would. Is this not our predicament at times today? Is this just unbelief, or is it simply not knowing what God will do? It can be both.

The man was “*full of leprosy*”, which suggests he was at the later stages. Normally lepers were outside the city, but we do not know if Jesus met him by the gate. As soon as Jesus heard the plea, He extended His hand and touched the leper. No-one ever did that for fear of getting the awful disease. But, God need not fear an human disease! Jesus touched the man and pronounced him to be clean of the disease. He was instantly cured. This is the usual pattern for divine healing – it comes about instantly and fully.

Jesus told the ex-leper not to tell anyone about the healing, but only to go to the local priest, who would take his offering and pronounce him clean, so he could return to society and family. This was Mosaic law. Note again how Jesus at this time had not yet ushered in the New promise or Testament. Therefore, He continued observing Jewish law.

In spite of His words, the man spread news of what Jesus had done and Jesus became a household name in the city. As a result even more crowds gathered to hear Him speak. And, of course, to be healed. After spending time at this, Jesus went back into the desert to pray. A ministry cannot stand on its own, but must always be supported by prayer, that God’s will can be known by the minister (remember – we ALL have a ministry).

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### Verses 17-20

1.

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 Judaea, and Jerusalem: and the power of the Lord was present to heal them.

2.

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.

3.

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.

4.

And when he saw their faith, he said unto him, Man, thy sins are forgiven thee.

On another day, a weekday, Jesus was teaching in a place, maybe a private house, attended by Jewish religious leaders – Pharisees and doctors of Jewish law, from around Israel. Jesus healed those who needed it. It seems the company of these leaders was incidental to Jesus preaching, for these vain men would not have publicly sat under Jesus' teaching for fear of losing face. Thus, they were already in this large home, before Jesus spoke.

Here we see that the famous account of Jesus healing the crippled man dropped through the roof, was in full view of these religious men. The man was "*taken with a palsy*", palsy being a word used for paralysis leaving the person weak on one side, and increasingly wasted limbs. His friends wanted Jesus to heal him, but could not get into the house.

So, they carried the man on his litter up the external stairs, to the roof. There, they removed

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enough tiles to allow them to let the litter down into the room with ropes. The litter or bed was positioned just in front of Jesus, Who saw their faith. He looked at the paralysed man and said “*Man, thy sins are forgiven thee.*”

This simple sentence produced shock-waves among the religious leaders!

### Verses 21-26

1.

And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, Who is this which speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?

2.

But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answering said unto them, What reason ye in your hearts?

3.

Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk?

4.

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.

5.

And immediately he rose up before them, and took up that whereon he lay, and departed to his own house, glorifying God.

6.

And they were all amazed, and they glorified God, and were filled with fear, saying, We have seen strange things to day.

The scribes (doctors) and Pharisees were beside themselves, but kept a political silence! They



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looked at each other in disbelief and whispered their horror at what Jesus had just said. They thought Jesus was blasphemous, for only God can forgive sins. (Yet again we see Jesus proclaiming His divinity). But, the Jewish leaders saw Him only as a troublemaker, taking the name of God unlawfully. Any Bible-believer today who questions the religious status quo is liable to the same kind of censorship and shunning!

Jesus, as He did at other times, discerned their thoughts and spoke out bluntly. He asked them why they thought such things in their hearts, condemning Him. Then He said something that has always been very profound to me: *“Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk?”*

The miracles the Pharisees and scribes could tolerate, because an human prophet could have done them. But, to forgive sins is no man’s lot – such a statement belonged only to God, and that kind of announcement could get a Jew put to death. Of course, Jesus was saying He was God! To say that He forgave a man’s sins was equal to saying He was God.

Jesus told them that to him both the healing of a condition and the forgiving of sins were equal to God, Whose power is infinite and absolute. So, He added another statement, saying to them that His next action - healing the man - would prove His divinity. He turned to the crippled man and said *“Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house.”*

The man immediately got up off his bed, stood, rolled up his bed, and walked out. When a man has been crippled for some time his limbs distort and grow useless; they become thin, with wasted, useless muscle. So, this meant that his affected leg and arm immediately became strong with new muscle, ligaments and tone. All this was witnessed before the accusing Jews. This was God’s work, and Jesus claimed Himself to be God, calling Himself the Son of man (means same as son of God).

The healed man went home praising God. Those in the house did the same thing, and yet they were afraid, because they had “seen strange things today”. One thing we can be assured of – the Pharisees and scribes did not see it the same way, but went to their own towns murmuring against this dangerous heretic named Jesus, Who called Himself God. The name of Jesus was spread abroad by followers, but secretly harboured by the Jewish leaders as a focus of hate and evil.

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1.

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.

2.

And he left all, rose up, and followed him.

3.

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.

Next, perhaps the same day, Jesus saw a tax collector sitting at his table in the toll house (tax office), taking taxes from the people. His name was Levi. You will remember that he would have been reviled by all his fellow Jews. Yet, Jesus spoke just two words to him: "Follow me". This indicated that Jesus wanted him to follow as a disciple. Despite his privileged, rich position, Levi stood straight away and left his taxes, to walk with Jesus.

Levi took Jesus to his house, which was probably substantial, and ordered his servants to cook a big meal. He sent out to his friends – and because he was despised, these were mainly fellow tax-collectors. They all sat down to the meal, with Jesus as honoured guest. We know from following texts that Jesus was accompanied by His disciples.

This tells us a great deal. For Levi to suddenly leave everything and follow Jesus, the Holy Spirit must have acted upon his conscience and spirit, making him alive where he was once dead. Jesus knew what would happen – this was no random suggestion, but a firm command by the Lord. It had to be obeyed. We also know that when Jesus went to the house and sat amongst tax collectors, He was sending out an amazingly provocative message.

We can see why some hated Him and others loved Him! But, He was not about winning friends (nor was He joining with sinners for the sake of it). He came to save sinners, and tax collectors

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were pretty much in the lowest part of the social barrel. Jesus did not care who people were; He merely wanted their obedience to God.

How many preachers and teachers spend their time courting loyalty and friends, putting out an aura of being 'everyone's pal'? How many do not say what they ought to say for fear of losing members? How many stay silent when wicked men proliferate, just in case their position in society is weakened? How many carefully fashion their lives so that most people love him or think he is wonderful? How many slavishly follow their peers, rather than risk being shunned? I used to do that! Then, I realised I had to speak truth, and it gave me few friends, sometimes even in my own family. Yet, it had to be done. God first – everything and everyone else second.

### Verses 30-35

1.

But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners?

2.

And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick.

3.

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

4.

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?

5.

And he said unto them, Can ye make the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them?

6.

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But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days.

Scribes and Pharisees who knew the tax collectors complained to the disciples who were with Jesus, because they sat at a meal with publicans. Jesus came to hear of this and answered them, saying that the healthy do not need a doctor, but the sick do. In a subtle way Jesus was mocking the Jewish leaders, who obviously thought their own souls were safe in God's hands.

Jesus identified the publicans with sin, and sin was a spiritual sickness. He said to the leaders, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Thus, Jesus was saying that if they thought they were right before God, then they ought to praise Him for it, but He had come to heal those who needed salvation, sinners who needed to repent. These He called, but those who inwardly denied their own sin, He left aside. Some take this incident to mean that Christians should always befriend the unrighteous, attend their functions, be with them socially. But, He was not doing this.

Jesus had just called Levi to be His disciple. This tells us that Levi had repented and followed. At his home he would have told his guests what had happened, and Jesus and the disciples would have spoken of the need for repentance and salvation. Jesus did not attend a party! He had a purpose, as He always did, and it was not to become a socialite. If Jesus just sat there and said nothing, the Pharisees would have had a point. This shows us that we can be in the company of the unsaved so long as there is a spiritual purpose. There is no other reason to be in their company.

The Pharisees were not satisfied though, and questioned Him further, hoping to catch Him out... as they always hoped to do. The Pharisees said they, and the disciples of John, fasted and prayed often, yet Jesus' disciples ate and drank normally. Why was this?

Jesus swiftly told them that the people at a wedding fast when the bridegroom is not with them, but, when the Bridegroom was with them, there was no need to fast! He was obviously referring to Himself. He continued, that He would be taken from them soon, so they could fast then. (This, by the way, is not a blanket instruction to fast; it was a matter of fact referring to His own execution).

### Verses 36-39

1.

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.

2.

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.

3.

But new wine must be put into new bottles; and both are preserved.

4.

No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new: for he saith, The old is better.

Jesus then gave them a parable. Normally, He used parables to confound His listeners, because they were spiritually blind. But, this one seems very clear: Nobody repairs an old garment with a patch of new cloth, because the new cloth will just pull and tear at the old cloth. For the same reason, nobody puts new wine in old bottles, because the effervescence of the new wine will cause the old leather to burst apart, thus spilling the wine. New wine must be put into new bottles. Only then can both be left safely. And, when a man has already drunk old wine, which is mature and better, he will not want to drink the brasher new wine... the old wine is much better.

Jesus was rebuking the Pharisees, saying that they could not understand Him with their old attitudes; they could not possibly understand His Gospel if they attempted to 'marry' it to their old religion. The new testament was indeed new, and incompatible with the old – there was no way the Pharisees could cobble it to their old ways and minds. Similarly, the majority of believers tend to want everything to fit their own schemes. If something comes along to rock that position they reject it automatically, rather than leave aside their old positions to embrace the new-in-Christ.

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This is what my own ministry has contended with for many decades, yet brethren persist in their ideas even when they are incompatible with scripture! However, it took me two earlier decades to realise my *own* errors, before I changed and opened my heart and mind to God alone. So, I know how easy it is to be caught up in tradition and false thoughts, and how utterly refreshing it is to breathe the cool freedom of Christ instead of the stifling hot air of tradition!

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