

Christ Declares His Purpose

Luke 5:1-11

I. The Stage

So it was, as the multitude pressed (hard pressed, pushing and shoving like when a Red Cross truck arrives with food for starving people and they press forward to try to grab some food) about Him (after all His signs and wonders) to hear the word of God (the word from the kingdom {Jn. 3:16}, and for the kingdom {Jn. 3:17}), that He (Jesus) stood by the Lake of Gennesaret (He was pressed right to the very shore of the Sea of Galilee),² and saw two boats standing by the lake (resting by the shore);

II. The Audience

but the fishermen had gone from them (left their boats) and were (in the water) washing their nets. (cleaning the seaweed, sticks, etc. out of them and mending them)³ Then He got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little from the land (to push the boat out a little ways into the water in order to give Jesus a little distance from the crowd). And He sat down and taught the multitudes (the Word of God) from the boat (it was the practice of the rabbis to sit down when they taught their disciples).

The Jewish people would get the significance of Jesus sitting down, understanding that He was about to teach them. "Quiet! The Rabbi is going to teach us."

III. The Illustration/Object Lesson

⁴ When He had stopped speaking, He (Jesus the carpenter) said to Simon, (the fisherman) "Launch out into the deep (water) and let down your nets for a catch." (Jesus gives them a jewel of an opportunity. He is offering to put food on their tables and provide money for their living. But, will they take Jesus up on it? We all too often don't take up Jesus' promises.)

⁵ But Simon answered and said to Him, "Master, we have toiled (worked hard) all night (we are weary) and caught nothing (we are tired, frustrated and disappointed); nevertheless at Your word (as they have seen, carries power and authority—Peter even seeing his own mother-in-law healed) I will let down the net (this was not the small net an individual would use. This was a big net that would require a whole crew to handle and rewash)."



Dragnet, or Drawnet (*sagēnē*, Matt. 13:47). Fishermen used this type of net in deeper water (Luke 5:4). It was a long net—sometimes nearly 100 m. (328 ft.) long—and about 2.5 m. (8 ft.) wide. The fisherman attached corks to one side to keep it buoyed up, and lead sinkers to the other side to make it sink.

Sometimes the net was stretched between two boats and the boats were rowed in a circle, drawing the net together. The ropes attached to the bottom of the net were drawn in faster than those at the top, which trapped the fish in the net (John 21:16).¹

⁶ And when they (the crew) had done this, they caught a great number (the mother load) of fish, and their net was breaking ({"pressed down and shaken together" -- Lu. 6:38} this doesn't mean that their net tore apart, but that they could hear and/or see evidences that it was beginning to break). ⁷ So they signaled (motioned) to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink (they were barely kept afloat).

This catch was not like the two men from Minnesota who went fishing up in Canada. They caught only one fish. When they got back, one of them said, "I figured out that that fish cost us \$400 a piece." "Well," said the other man, "at that price it's a good thing we didn't catch more than one!"

DEEP WATER

Picture the scene: Simon and other experienced, career fishermen have been trying all night to catch fish. They know the lake, and they know their trade, yet they have caught nothing. Jesus, a carpenter, tells them to move out into the deeper water and try again. Simon and the others must have felt like telling Jesus he should stick to building furniture and leave the fishing to the experts ... but they didn't. Instead, they obeyed him. Have you ever been in a situation where you felt that Jesus couldn't possibly understand your needs? Many acts of service [for God] and [trials in which we must rest in] God require moving out into deeper water. [We must] Learn a lesson from a bunch of fishermen: Listen to Jesus[, rest in His promises,] and obey his commands, however difficult they may be to do.²

The challenge always facing fishermen is finding the fish. Even experienced fishermen, using the latest fish-finding sonar, often come up empty. The Lord Jesus Christ, however, knew exactly where the fish were. As the One who created everything (John 1:3; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2), He has an exhaustive knowledge of all [His] creatures—even to the point of knowing when a sparrow falls to the ground (Matt. 10:29)—since "there is no creature hidden from His sight" (Heb. 4:13).³

¹ Packer, J., Tenney, M. C., & White, W. (1997). *Nelson's illustrated manners and customs of the Bible* (269). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

² Barton, B. B., Veerman, D., Taylor, L. C., & Osborne, G. R. (1997). *Luke. Life application Bible commentary* (113). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

³ MacArthur, J. (2009). *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary Luke 1-5* (304). Chicago: Moody Publishers.

Doesn't it make sense that if Christ has a name for all the stars in the universe, He certainly knows where all His creatures are and what they are going through on this itty bitsy, tiny weenie planet?

The Lord is a generous Master, and He enjoys lavishing His blessings upon His people, but with a purpose, not to just lavish us with things or pleasures. [Jesus was authenticating Himself as the messenger of God and His message as well [The point of the object lesson]. What had Jesus done just prior to the miracles? Taught the Word!

The Lord always supersedes us. He superseded Peter in his command of the boat, which he had navigated since he was a lad. There is always a testing-point for the soul. Will you surrender the command and let Christ be captain? If so, in the teeth of great difficulties for fish are not caught generally in the glare of day he will fill your boat to the water's edge. He does beyond all we asked or thought.

F. B. Meyer⁴

IV. The Recognition of the Messenger

⁸ When Simon Peter saw it (the unimaginable – a net filled with fish beyond capacity, filled at the wrong time of the day and filled simply by the word of Jesus!), he fell down (Peter collapsed, fell in a heap) at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man (Peter), O Lord!" (Jesus – "Lord" here is Kurios, which means God. All the dots came together for Peter at this point, he recognizes the Messenger and believes in His message – This Person before him was much more than a mere man like himself, He was the Lord, the God of all man. And like Isaiah, at the throne of God the Father, Peter wanted some distance between him and God the Son, knowing he was a sinful man. Listen, if Jesus could see into the murky depths of the Sea, He could see into the dark chambers of Peter's heart too, and if Jesus could see into Peter's heart, He can see into yours and mine as well.)

[Peter] was overwhelmed with the realization that he was face-to-face with [a] Holy [and just] God.⁵ He felt completely exposed and vulnerable.

⁴ Barton, B. B., Veerman, D., Taylor, L. C., & Osborne, G. R. (1997). Luke. Life application Bible commentary (113). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

⁵ MacArthur, J. (2009). The MacArthur New Testament Commentary Luke 1-5 (307). Chicago: Moody Publishers.

⁹ For he (Peter) and all who were with him were astonished (as well) at the (impossible) catch of fish which they had taken; ¹⁰ and so also were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were (fishing) partners with Simon.

V. The Declaration of the Purpose

And Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid. (stop being frightened, cheer up) From now on you will catch men.” (You will see men drawn to your side.) ¹¹ So when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all (that creation, this world could offer him) and followed Him (their Creator, and what He could offer them).

[Being exposed and vulnerable before anyone can be a fersome experience, especially before the Lord! But, Jesus says, “Do not be afraid”

- The same words God told Abraham when He appeared to Abraham in a vision, (Gen. 15:1)
- The same words Jesus said to Paul when He appeared to Paul in a vision, (Acts 18:9)
- The same words Jesus said to the apostle John when He appeared to John in a vision, (Rev. 1:17) [and now God has appeared to Peter.]

Yes, Jesus in a holy, just and righteous God.....but.....through the cross.....Jesus has made a way for mankind to come boldly to the throne of grace, (Heb. 4:16). “For God sent His Son not into the human race, but that the human race, through Him, might be saved.” (John 3:17)

When one is confronted with Jesus, it is impossible to remain neutral. His enemies react to his miracles with hatred and reviling; his true disciples, with homage and reverence. They stoop and worship.⁶

In Psalm 51:17 David wrote, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite (crushed) heart, O God, You will not despise.” Through the prophet Isaiah God declared, “For thus says the high and exalted One Who lives forever, whose name is Holy, ‘I dwell on a high and holy place, and also with the contrite and lowly of spirit in order to revive[!] the spirit of the lowly and to revive[!] the heart of the contrite’ ” (Isa. 57:15; cf. 66:2). At their moment of deepest alienation when, overwhelmed by their sinfulness, Peter, James, and John sought to flee [depart from the Lord, BUT], Jesus [on the other hand.....listen] reached out

to pull them to Himself. ⁷ God is holy, just and righteous, but He is also gracious, merciful and forgiving.

Luke 9:23–25 – Then He (Jesus) said to *them* all, [a few chapters later] “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. ²⁴ For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. ²⁵ For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost?

Won't you, if you have not already, surrender what creation can provide you in order to receive all that your Creator, Jesus, can give you? You can't serve two masters, it's one or the other.

When It Comes to Compassion: Jesus Has No Bounds

A Leper is Cleansed

I. The dreaded disease

¹² And it happened when He (**Jesus**) was in a certain city (of which we are not told), that behold, a man who was full of (saturated with, covered with, immersed in) leprosy saw Jesus; (this man is an extreme case – we would say today that he was “way” beyond help or hope)

Leprosy, or Hansen's disease... was common enough in Israel to warrant extensive regulation in the Mosaic law of those suffering from it and related skin diseases (Lev. 13–14)...

...The horrible disfigurement caused by leprosy made it greatly feared, and caused lepers to be outcasts, cut off from all healthy society, for [the] protection [of the healthy].

And [unfortunately because] God had cursed [some] people by giving them leprosy, such as Gehazi (2 Kings 5:25–27) and Uzziah (2 Chron. 26:16–23). Thus, people with this disease were viewed as cursed by God...⁸

II. The desperate victim

^{12b} and he (the leper, humbled himself and) fell on his face (this is a phrase for worship, meaning here that he began to worship Jesus [like Peter in the boat when he said, “depart from me Lord, for I am a sinful man.”]) and implored (begged,

⁷ MacArthur, J. (2009). *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary Luke 1-5* (308). Chicago: Moody Publishers.

⁸ MacArthur, J. (2009). *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary Luke 1-5* (313–314). Chicago: Moody Publishers.

pleaded with) Him, saying, “Lord, (Kurios, the same word Peter used in the boat when he said, “Lord, depart from me...”), if (conditional clause) You are willing, You can make me clean.” (the leper professed and exercised faith in Jesus’ Person, His deity calling Him [“Lord”] and thus His abilities as well [“You can make me well”]). He pleaded that Jesus would will it. “All you have to do is say the word.”) (cf., when Jesus came down from the Mt. of transfiguration, “If you can heal my son...’IF’ I can?!”)

The leper’s approach to Jesus graphically illustrates penitent sinners’ approach to Him.

- They come in desperation, casting aside their self-righteous efforts to save themselves as the filthy garments that they are (Isa. 64:6). “We are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; we all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.”
- They come in reverence, affirming Jesus as Lord (Rom. 10:9), God (John 8:24), and the only Savior (Acts 4:12). (THOMAS: “My Lord and my God!” – “Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name given among men whereby we must be saved!”)
- They come with a sense of urgency, knowing that “now is the acceptable time ... now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor. 6:2).
- They come in humility, poor in spirit (Matt. 5:3), deserving nothing from the sovereign and knowing they have nothing to commend themselves. (but if He wills – He is not willing that any should parish”)
- Finally, they come in faith, because “to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness” (Rom. 4:5).⁹

III. The divine compassion

¹³ Then He (Jesus) put out His hand and “TOUCHED!” him (Whoa! Just the “sight” of that act would cause people to gasp out loud and take a step back. With that hand Jesus could push anybody in any direction He wanted.), saying, “I am willing (I will say the word); be cleansed.” Immediately (with just a single 2 word sentence from Jesus) the leprosy (completely) left him (the idea here is not only did the leprosy leave the individual, but so did the disfigurement and nerve damage of his body).

According to Alfred Edersheim, in his book *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* [Now, let me tell you a little bit about a leper's life and how significant that "touch" was.]

- Lepers were strictly forbidden to come near other people (cf. Luke 17:12),
- [They couldn't] interact with anyone except other lepers.
- So great was the fear of [contamination] that lepers were barred from Jerusalem or any other walled city (cf. 2 Kings 7:3).
- They were forbidden to come within six feet of a healthy person (one hundred and fifty feet if the wind was blowing from the direction of the leper) [when was the last time you checked to see what direction the wind was blowing in a crowd?]
- [They] were restricted to a special compartment in the synagogue.
- One rabbi refused to eat an egg bought on a street where there was a leper.
- Another advocated throwing stones at lepers to force them to keep their distance [That's real Godlike...]. (cf. Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974], 1:492–95).
- Leprosy was second only to contact with a dead body in terms of defilement. "Not merely actual contact with the leper, but even his entrance defiled a [home], and everything in it, to the beams of the roof.... If he even put his head into a place, it became unclean." (And Jesus "touched" him) (Edersheim, *Life and Times*, 1:494, 95).

In the eyes of those around Jesus:

- ➔ Jesus would have immediately made Himself unclean by touching the leper
- ➔ Jesus could possibly have jeopardized His own health
- ➔ Jesus could possibly have jeopardized His future ministry (who would want to come and hear a leprous man?)
- ➔ Jesus could possibly become a social outcast

That the leper approached Jesus in violation of rabbinic law reveals his desperation. He was past fear, past shame, and heedless of the danger to himself or others; he literally had nothing left to lose.¹⁰

Have you ever thought that Jesus wouldn't have anything to do with you? If you are willing, you can make me clean. I am willing, Jesus said.

IV. The direct command

¹⁴ And He (Jesus) charged him (the man healed of leprosy) to tell no one, (what Jesus Himself had done, how he had been healed) "But go and show yourself to the

priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as a testimony to them, just as Moses commanded.”

The process by which a cleansed leper was readmitted to society involved going to the temple for an examination by a priest, shaving, bathing, washing his clothes, offering multiple animal sacrifices, along with an offering of grain and oil (Lev. 14:1–20). The entire procedure lasted for eight days (Lev. 14:10). If he obeyed and went to [tell] to the priests how Jesus had healed him, it would be a powerful testimony to them that Jesus was indeed the Messiah and Son of God. This testimony would be either convincing to the priests so that they would acknowledge the claims of Christ, or if they rejected Him self-indicting, since they had personally examined the miraculously healed leper.¹¹

V. The disrespectful response

¹⁵ However (contrary to Jesus wishes), the report went around concerning Him (concerning Jesus healing the leper) all the more; and great (mega) multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by Him of their infirmities.

Mark 1:45 – However, he (the leper) went out and began to proclaim it freely (to anyone and everyone), and to spread the matter, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter the city, but was outside in deserted places; and they came to Him from every direction.

(Have you ever thought about the fact that)

Our Sin Even Affects Christ

- This leper forced limitations on Jesus’ ministry (He could no longer openly enter a city)
- He forced Jesus to spend much of His time in desolate areas
- He restricted the severely disabled from getting to Jesus unless someone was willing to carry them.
- Our sin grieves Jesus (e.g., He grieved and wept over Jerusalem)
- Our sin limits Jesus’ ability to use us at times (e.g.,

An Example of Jesus' Prayer Life

¹⁶ So He Himself (Jesus, singular, alone, by Himself—There are times for corporate prayer too, like prayer meeting at Mary's house praying for Peter in prison) often (on a regular basis, habitually—this was Jesus' regular practice. The disciples wouldn't get overly concerned to roll over at night and not see Jesus.) withdrew (removed Himself, retreated, disappeared—Jesus removed himself from the world) into the wilderness (away from others, distractions and the hustle and bustle—e.g., cell phones, iPods, computers, etc.) and prayed (visited, fellowshiped, communed with God the Father and Holy Spirit—[1] for us worship would be part of this. [2] In our high-tech age we are losing the understanding and blessing of this).

A. W. Tozer gives tremendous insight as he writes these profound words in his book *The Knowledge of the Holy*: “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.” (Think about that: [1] Your job place downsizes and lays you off...what do you think about God? [2] Your boyfriend or girlfriend breaks up with you... [3] Someone very close to you dies unexpectedly... [4] The world calls evil good and good evil...)

- Why are you at church today? (What is it about God that brought you to church today?)
- Why are you not at church other Sundays?
- What is it you hope to achieve by your coming?
- What is it you hope to receive by coming?
- How much focused attention are you giving towards what you want to achieve and receive, (How passionate and alert are you concerning these goals?)
 - or how easily are you distracted from those goals, (a butterfly, a fidgeting person, a problem at work or school, an event latter today...)
 - or even bored by God's design for the church as a whole? (You can't wait until this is over...)
- How much preparation, forethought do you give to your goals even before you get here? (What kind of mental and physical preparation did you go through last night? Do you go through any preparation before you take communion?)

JB Phillips has a thought, “Let us fling wide the doors and windows of our minds and make some attempt to appreciate the “size” of God.” (JB Phillips, *Your God Is too Small* NY NY Macmillan Co. 1961 pp 61) (The size of God’s love, holiness, grace, mercy, etc....)

Listen, “Through Jesus Christ, God offers to us understanding and intimacy.” How valuable is that to you? It was so important to Jesus that, “He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed. (We can assess the value we place on God’s offering of understanding and intimacy by meditating on one word in this verse, “OFTEN.”

Jesus Shows He Is Much More Than a Miracle Man

I. The Religious were there to investigate, scrutinize

¹⁷ Now it happened on a certain day, as He (Jesus) was teaching (instructing), that there were Pharisees and teachers of the law (Pharisees and their scribes [who would be called lawyers today] who specialized in the interpretation and application of the law) sitting by (all wound up tight; waiting for a chance to spring up and cry foul! Heretic!), who had come out of every town of (the regions of) Galilee, Judea, and Jerusalem (showing the degree of their concern concerning this upstart Rabbi, Jesus and His growing popularity).

The Pharisees were one of the five main Jewish movements in Jesus’ day

- The Pharisees can be traced back to the times of Ezra, as early as 538 B.C..
- They were the conservative separatists who were very concerned with the protection, interpretation and application of the Law of Moses. Unfortunately as a movement, they for the most part, veered off into legalism and eventually added numerous manmade traditions to the law. So much so that Jesus said in Matthew 15:6b, “...you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition.” They traded a relational relationship with God for a ritual religion.
- The Pharisees were mostly made up of the middle class and were greatly outnumbered by the Sadducees, but were favored over the Sadducees.
- “They believed in
 - the resurrection (Acts 23:6–8),
 - angels (Acts 23:8),

- demons,
- predestination,
- and human responsibility.
- They looked for Messiah to come and establish an earthly kingdom¹²

The **Sadducees** can be traced back to times of Jonathan Maccabeus in the Jewish revolt against Seleucids from 160 B.C. to 143 B.C..

- They were mostly made up of the upper class, wealthy, elite priests
- They controlled the temple worship
- They only acknowledged the first 5 books of the OT as authoritative
- They rejected:
 - The Oral Law
 - Miracles
 - The resurrection of the dead
- They accepted the Roman rule
- They all but disappeared with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70

The Herodians, Zealots and Essenes were the other three that we will talk about another time.

II. The power was there to heal

^{17b} And the power (omnipotence) of the Lord (meaning here the power of God the Father and Spirit) was present (the power was upon Jesus, enabling Him) to heal (physically, emotionally and/or spiritually) them (the unbelievers).

This is a reminder to us that Jesus (in His humanity only) needed the assistance of God the Father and Spirit just like all gospel believers do. Philippians 2:6–7 tells us that, **“Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation (but functioned as a human), taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.”**

Jesus is a perfect “High Priest” and example for us. He has been tempted as we are... We have access to the same power Jesus did!!

Jesus was also about to enter into a huge and long-lasting power struggle with the religious leaders. These healings would bring joy to the godless and misery to the religious.

III. The needy were there to receive

¹⁸ Then behold (as Jesus was teaching and the Pharisees were scrutinizing), men (Mark tells us there were 4 of them) brought on a bed a man who was paralyzed (this paralyzed man was very fortunate to have friends who would do this as those with such disabilities were often thought to be under the judgment of God), whom they sought to bring in (the building where Jesus was teaching) and lay before Him. ¹⁹ And when they could not find how they might bring him in, because of the (overflow) crowd, they (didn't give up but) went up on the housetop and (after removing a portion of the roof) let him down with his bed through the tiling into the midst before Jesus.



- How many of you would **like** such committed friends as that!
- How many of you are committed to **be** such friends as that?

IV. The authority was there to forgive.

²⁰ When He (Jesus) saw their faith (there is no indication whatever that any of the men said a word to Jesus, but to Jesus, the faith of each of them was self-evident and), He said to him, “Man, your sins are forgiven you.” (They brought the man for a physical need, but Christ knew the paralyzed man’s greatest need.)

Whoa! Can't you see the heads of the Pharisees and Scribes snap?! They probably had to go to the chiropractor afterwards.

We notice here that:

- God was desirous of **healing**, not **judging**. (It's the same with you and your sin... John 3:17 – For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.)
- God knew the man's **spiritual** healing was a greater need than his **physical** healing. (as Jesus forgave his sins. They came for one kind of healing, but got “SO MUCH MORE”!

- God healed the paralyzed man as well, for the benefit of the Scribes and Pharisees to meet their need. (Jesus wasn't trying to push their buttons. Jesus was trying to open up their hearts and minds.)

John MacArthur so beautifully says, "Forgiveness is both mankind's greatest need, and God's most important gift—and the only means for blessing in this life and eternal life in heaven."

What greater need could we ever have, than the initial **judicial forgiveness** and the continual **parental forgiveness** in order to be right with our Creator God!?

- ➔ Jesus Christ came into the world to "save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21; cf. 26:28),
- ➔ And "through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins" (Acts 10:43; cf. 5:31; 26:18; Eph. 1:7; 4:32; Col. 1:14; 2:13–14; 3:13; 1 John 1:9; 2:12; Rev. 1:5)...

Here are some examples of the blessing and wonder of God's forgiveness:

- After Adam and Eve sinned, "the Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them" (Gen. 3:21)... (The wages of sin is death, but God spared their lives by taking the lives of innocent animals.)
- The Lord described Himself to Moses as "the Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin" (Ex. 34:6–7; cf. Num. 14:18).
- Nehemiah 9:17 calls Him a "God of forgiveness."
- In Psalm 65:3 David wrote, "Iniquities prevail against me; as for our transgressions, You forgive them,"
- ...in 86:5, he declared, "For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in lovingkindness to all who call upon You."
- In Psalm 103:12, David depicted the extensiveness of God's forgiveness when he noted that "as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us."
- In 130:3–4, the psalmist expressed his confidence in God's forgiveness: "If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared."
- Speaking of the promised forgiveness in the New covenant, God declared, "I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more" (Jer. 31:34).
- Micah joyously exclaimed, "Who is a God like You, who pardons iniquity and passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of His possession?" (Mic. 7:18; cf. Isa. 55:7).
- The Old Testament likens God's forgiveness to His

- casting sins behind His back (Isa. 38:17),
- wiping them out (Isa. 43:25; cf. 1:18; 44:22),
- trampling them under His feet (Mic. 7:19),
- and burying them in the depths of the sea (Mic. 7:19)¹³

Man's greatest need is forgiveness, and God's greatest gift is forgiveness.

Faith is a living, daring confidence in God's grace. It is so sure and certain that a man could stake his life on it a thousand times.

*Martin Luther*¹⁴

Jesus said to the man, "Your sins are forgiven." I'm sure his head jerked too.

As things progress on we see just what we would expect:

V. The religious denounce.

²¹ And (horrified and furious) the scribes and the Pharisees (immediately) began to reason (meaning here to question and argue), saying, "Who is this (which was meant to be a derogatory reference to Jesus) who speaks blasphemies? (Blaspheming [how?] in the sense that Jesus unjustly claims the attributes and prerogatives [power and authority] of deity¹⁵ as they say) Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Jesus would be thinking here, "Bingo. Open your hearts and minds!")

Notice Jesus' response:

VI. The Christ rebuts

²² But when Jesus perceived their (derogatory and dishonoring) thoughts, He answered and (confronting them with their blasphemous thinking) said to them, "Why are you reasoning (questioning and arguing about My words and actions) in your hearts? (Why does Jesus say their heart rather than mind? Because the heart is the control center of our lives.¹⁶) ²³ (It's as if Jesus was saying allow Me to speak to your lying, faulty, deceiving heart) Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Rise up and walk'?"

¹³ MacArthur, J. (2009). The MacArthur New Testament Commentary Luke 1-5 (321-322). Chicago: Moody Publishers.

¹⁴ Barton, B. B., Veerman, D., Taylor, L. C., & Osborne, G. R. (1997). Luke. Life application Bible commentary (123). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

¹⁵ Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953-2001). Vol. 11: New Testament commentary : Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke. New Testament Commentary (297). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

¹⁶ Proverbs 4:23 (NLT) – Guard your heart above all else, for it (your heart) determines the course of your life.

Now think this through with me for a moment—this beautiful scenario

- Forgiving sin and healing are both equally impossible for man. Right? We don't possess the attributes and prerogatives, power and authority of deity.)
- But, if Satan can take one's health, (e.g., Job's) it is perceivable that he could give health as well. (So man is completely out at the onset, but Satan isn't.)
- Only God can forgive sin though. (Satan can't do that, so he is out now too.)
- But yet, just saying "Your sins are forgiven you," is easy for anyone to say and who is to say whether they were or not.
- But, if you were expecting for the paralyzed man to be healed in connection with the forgiveness of his sins (as is the case in this passage) and he isn't healed, you would say his sins were not really forgiven.
- So to erase all questions about man, Satan and Jesus Himself as Jesus says, "arise."

²⁴ But that you may know (have empirical evidence in order to cease your questioning and arguing) that the Son of Man (which is Jesus' favorite way to refer to Himself ["...Unto you a Child is born, and a Son is given..." Isa. 9:6]¹⁷ has power on earth to forgive sins" (thus proving I am God, and am not a blasphemer)—He said to the man who was paralyzed, "I say to you ("the paralyzed man;" with the crowd there Jesus may have had to be specific or His Word could have healed everyone there – [e.g., "Lazarus come forth" verses everyone come forth]), arise (first stand up, now), take up your bed, and (finally) go to your house (walk—the paralyzed man is healed instantly and completely to full physical and spiritual health and strength)."

Jesus is **MUCH** more than a miracle man. He can not only meet man's great needs—e.g., healing, strength, peace, hope, etc., but man's greatest need—forgiveness.

VII. The needy believe

¹⁷ Isaiah 9:6a – For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

²⁵ Immediately (without hesitation or difficulty) he rose up before them, took up what he had been lying on, and departed to his own house (doing what?), glorifying God (giving credit, praise and thanksgiving to God for being spiritually and physically healed – he is giving his testimony of God’s work in his life—forgiveness opens the doors to glorify God!) ²⁶ And they were all amazed (astonished, in awe), and they (too) glorified God (they gave God credit and praise for what they had seen) and were filled (seized, overcome) with fear (this is a serious and sincere, holy respect as they now saw Jesus not only as a healer, but as God Himself, who could see and act on their sin—It’s the same kind of fear that came filled the people who saw Ananias and Saphira die after lying to the Holy Spirit.), saying, “We have seen strange (i.e., remarkable, incredible, wonderfully unbelievable) things today!” (Things which could not be believed unless one saw them for themselves – The people certainly didn’t believe that Jesus was a blasphemer, but there is no evidence that there was any heart adjustment with any of the scribes or Pharisees.)

I believe that verses 25 and 26 are the key focus and message of God in this entire passage.

I do not fear that many of us are like the Scribes and Pharisees and thereby don’t believe in and accept Christ’s Person and thus His power and willingness to heal us, either physically or spiritually—as the paralyzed man and his four friends. But I do fear, that we stop way too near our healing and do not progress far and deep into a serious and perpetual and increasing amazement, glorification and absolute fear and respect of God in our daily lives.

- Whereby everything we say, do and think is measured by God’s approval or disapproval.
- Whereby our entire life revolves around God’s
- Whereby we really understand the phrase bondservant of the Lord

Christ’s purpose was to do the Father’s will, not His own, and the Father’s will was to bring spiritual healing to our lives, in order that we may get back on track to fulfill the Father’s will for man; to glorify Him. “Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”

Is it not even more tragic, to be given a second chance after Adam and Eve’s fall, to fulfill our created purpose, through salvation in Christ, and turn our backs

again! on God, by giving preeminence to ourselves and our personal lives, rather than to our Creator, and His will for our lives? Thanking God for the fire insurance (escape from Hell), but not willing to glorify Him with our entire life.

The Steps and Transformation of an Active Disciple

Tony Campolo told how, upon arrival in Honolulu, he made his way unwittingly to a seedy part of town for a snack at 3:30 in the morning, to be surrounded by eight or nine prostitutes who had just taken the night off. He overheard one of them beside him saying to her girlfriend, “Tomorrow is my birthday.” Her friend rebutted, “So what do you want from me? You want me to get you a cake and sing, ‘Happy Birthday?’” The birthday girl protested, “Why do you have to be so mean? I was just telling you, that’s all. Why do you have to put me down? Why should you give me a birthday party now when I’ve never had a birthday party in my whole life?”

When the girls left, Campolo decided to decorate the place the next night and give the birthday girl a surprise party with the help of the bartender, who happily chipped in the cake. The next day, the stunned girl was so taken back when the whole bar sang a birthday song to her. She first refused to cut the cake, then asked if she could keep the cake a little longer, and finally, for some unknown reason, even dashed home with the cake after promising to return with it later.

Campolo offered to say a prayer for the woman before the stunned crowd, and after prayer, the bartender remarked, “Hey! You never told me you were a preacher. What kind of church do you belong to?” Campolo replied, “I belong to a church that throws birthday parties for girls like this at 3:30 in the morning.” The bartender then sneered, “No you don’t. There’s no church like that. If there was, I’d join it.” (The Kingdom of God is a Party 3-8, Tony Campolo, Dallas: Word Publishing, 1990).

I. The Master Selects His Pupil

²⁷ After these things (after healing the paralyzed man and confronting the Scribes and Pharisees) He (Jesus) went out (of the house) and saw (lit, “gazed intently at”) a tax collector (whom most viewed those in this profession as the scum of the earth—most gazed upon him, but with scorn) named Levi (mostly known as Matthew who wrote The Gospel of Matthew), sitting at the tax office (or booth).

His occupation as a **tax collector** made Matthew one of the most hated and despised men in Israel. Tax collectors were the dregs of Jewish society; they were

the lowest of the low on the social scale, and symbolized the worst sinners (cf. v. 30; 7:34; 18:11; Matt. 18:17; 21:31). That Jesus would save a tax collector, and then make him on top of that, an apostle, was utterly inconceivable to the scribes and Pharisees.

[Christ says in Matthew 16:18 that He will build His church. If you are not in a church that rejoices over thieves, prostitutes and tax collectors searching for God, maybe it's a church man is building and not God.]

Tax collectors had a certain amount that they were required to collect, and whatever they collected beyond that they were permitted to keep (cf. Luke 3:12–13). In addition to the poll tax (on everyone, including slaves), income tax (about 1 percent), and land tax (one tenth of all grain, and one fifth of all wine and fruit), there were taxes on the transport of goods, letters, produce, using roads, crossing bridges, and almost anything else the rapacious, greedy minds of the tax collectors could think of. All of that left plenty of room for larceny, extortion, exploitation, and even loan sharking, as tax collectors loaned money at exorbitant interest to those who were unable to pay their taxes. Tax collectors also employed thugs to physically intimidate people into paying, and to beat up those who refused.

All of that was anathema to the Jewish people, who believed God was the only one to whom they should pay taxes. Tax collectors were viewed as traitors to their people, were classified as unclean, and were barred from the synagogues. They were also forbidden to give testimony in a Jewish court, because they were considered to be liars. Repentance was deemed especially difficult for tax collectors.¹⁸

Matthew would have known who Jesus was, as by this time Jesus had made Capernaum his home.

II. The Master Calls His Pupil

^{27b} And (for Matthew and the people this time instead of the Scribes and Pharisees) He said to him (Levi—Christ engages Levi in conversation),

III. The Master Instructs His Pupil

^{27c} “Follow Me.” (What does that mean? Does it mean, for awhile or a long time? Does it mean, to the market or a meeting? No, it means much more. It means to cease to follow after your will and desires in order to devote yourself to Mine. It mean complete transformation.)

A good example of this is the former slave trader, John Newton. Newton's tombstone reads, "John Newton, Clerk, once an infidel and libertine, a servant of slaves in Africa, was, by the rich mercy of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, preserved, restored, pardoned, and appointed to preach the faith he had long labored to destroy."

[You see] Jesus is willing, able and present to rescue, deliver, and transform sinners like you and me. To the world, you may be poison, a potential troublemaker, or a dirty rotten scoundrel, but to Him, you are precious, a potential child of God, and poor lost sheep. You may be down on yourself, far from God, and over your head with problems, but God goes out of His way, looks for you, and calls you to follow Him. Levi did not seek or call for Jesus and see Him across the way. Jesus did not bump into Levi or stop to rest. He "called" on and called to Levi.

Even thieves and the like are made in God's image.

IV. The Pupil Responds to the Master's Invitation

A. He wastes no time

²⁸ So he (immediately initiates some action—put his hand to the plow—he's up and on the move)

B. He makes no conditions: his commitment is unconditional

left all (he understood what "follow Me" meant, he didn't look back—but left his personal ambitions and all that he had and what the world had to offer behind, forever, to devote himself to Christ's desires and will. Cf., the rich man—Mk. 10:17-24),

C. He needs no security: no assurances about his future (what are the benefits and costs Lord? What can I expect?)

(Levi simply) rose up (took the first step—Levi took the hand of God that reached out to him),

D. He leaves no trace: i.e., of his past life

and followed Him (kept on walking—dying more to himself with every step, for what he believed was greater gain).

Levi was a transformed man. The more you invest in Christlikeness, the easier and more natural it becomes to invest even more. You can't serve two masters, (Matt. 6:24)

The power of God's promises are unleashed to transform our lives through our commitment to follow Christ. in wasting no time, in making no conditions, in needing no security and progressively leaving no trace of one's former life.

V. The Pupil Honors His New Master

A. By giving Christ a feast

²⁹ Then (showing evidence of a real profession of faith—as an expression of his great joy) Levi gave Him (Jesus) a great feast (in honor of Jesus and His fantastic news) in his own house (most, did not have a house any were near the size that could entertain a great crowd. Matthew had probably exacted a lot of money from the people).

B. By providing Christ an Audience

And there were a great number of (other) tax collectors and others (insinuating others of similar sinful lifestyles and backgrounds which the scribes and Pharisees we'll see, affirm in the next verse) who sat down with them (all of whom Matthew was desirous of introducing to Christ and His good news—Some think that these "others" were the thugs or enforcers of the tax collectors—those who made you a deal you couldn't refuse).

No self-respecting Jew would eat a meal with the likes of this crowd. Meals were important social statements of acceptance in Israel, and Luke describes not just this meal, but several meals in his inspired record of Jesus' ministry (cf. 7:36; 10:38–40; 11:37; 14:1; 22:14; 24:30).¹⁹

This was a crowd that Jesus could not reach in the synagogues, as they had been excommunicated because their profession was seen as traitorous against their countrymen.²⁰

The new Levi was no longer selfishly chasing after riches, but purposefully following after Jesus. He had discovered a new purpose, a new attitude, and a new priority in life. Levi was done with the past, optimistic of the future, and currently under new management.

19 MacArthur, J. (2009). The MacArthur New Testament Commentary Luke 1-5 (332). Chicago: Moody Publishers.

20 Barton, B. B., Veerman, D., Taylor, L. C., & Osborne, G. R. (1997). Luke. Life application Bible commentary (129–130). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

Do you need a new purpose, attitude and/or priority in life? Thieves aren't the only people who need these things.

Are you afraid of commitment to Jesus? Desertion by friends? Leaving or losing your all?

Like the rich man, we tend to think all about what we're giving up, not what we're gaining. We tend to have trust issues so we want the "bird in the hand."

You are never alone, poor or powerless if you have Jesus. For our sakes Jesus, though he was rich, became poor, so that through his poverty we might become rich (2 Cor 8:9).

This doesn't necessarily mean being rich financially or in power or in health even. It certainly means being rich in peace, in fulfillment, purpose, wisdom, hope, etc.

C. By remaining committed to Christ in spite of criticism

³⁰ And their (uninvited) scribes and the Pharisees (who still knew what was going on and at an opportune time later) complained against His disciples, saying, "Why do You eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" (expressing that they thought this was outrageous behavior. Behavior that, in their minds, didn't match who Christ claimed He was. God the Son!)

But they don't know this Christ who was building His church and the kinds of people who were making up His congregation.

Think of the organization Alcoholics Anonymous for a moment. Imagine if some of the chapters came to feel themselves so respectful, that if a sloppy inebriated individual walked into one of their meetings and made a scene that he or she would be verbally accosted and tossed out of the meeting and back into the street. "Imagine—an organization dedicated to helping alcoholics, offended by drunken behavior! And yet the church could find itself all too easily in a similar dilemma."²¹

VI. The Master Honors His New Disciples

A. He stands up for them

³¹ Jesus (overhearing the conversation—confronts the Pharisees with pious their estimation of themselves and) answered and said to them, (Jesus spoke up, He didn't

ignore them or their comments. Has anyone not spoken up for you? If so, you know how big a deal this is.)

B. He reaches out to them

“Those who are well (which the scribes and Pharisees certainly considered themselves to be—viewing themselves as worthy of salvation, by their merits and thus believe they) have no need of a physician, but (Christ came for) those who are sick (those who view themselves as unworthy, knowing they **DO** need salvation and thus a Savior, like Levi and so many others).

Think about this...Jesus reached out to the Pharisees and to reaches out to us today in very basic terms.

- Who needs a doctor? Those who know their ill and can't get over their illness on their own. You don't have to be religious to even understand Jesus' point, but you've got to recognize what your condition is, who can help you, and why you need help.
- Who is Jesus calling today? Not those who have the answers, but those who are looking for answers.
- What is required? Salvation is available to all who are willing to turn from sin and turn to God, the Physician for help.

It's been said, “Every saint has a past and every sinner a future.” Jesus came for those who are less than perfect, those who are far from perfect, and those who are anything but perfect. God made Jesus who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him [the Physician] we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor 5:21). You can be like Levi, who understood, relinquished, and transformed his past, or you can be like Pharisees and the teachers of the law with their stiff-upper lip, narrow mindset and false self-importance. Jesus Christ is the Great Physician to those who are sick, the Wonderful Savior to the confessing sinner, and the Mediator to the Father.

[1. Recognize your condition 2. Go to the Physician, 3. Follow Him.]

[For those who are saved] Are you a channel of blessing to others, a vessel for God's use, and an instrument of God's peace? God is not in the business of making sleeping saints or silent servants out of lost sinners. He [desires for] His

children [to] speak His name, share His love, and seek the lost. Levi put his house in order, put others before [him]self, and put his money where his [new heart is]. We as gospel believers and as a church must not forget our commission. "Follow and Go".

- Paul Harvey said, "Too many Christians are no longer fishers of men but keepers of the aquarium." (These are churches that have lost their saltiness, that have extinguished their light, that have refocused on self.)
- Paul Little in his book "How to Give Away Your Faith" defines witnessing: "Witnessing is that deep-seated conviction that the greatest favor I can do for others is to introduce them to Jesus Christ."

C. He has high hopes in them

(Just in case you missed the symbolism of the Physician concerning the well and the sick, I'll make it very simple and crystal clear!) ³² I have not come to call the (self-)righteous (like the Pharisees), but sinners (like Levi, the sick has acknowledged himself to be), to repentance."

[This event] indicated how absurd the Pharisees' position was. In effect, they were saying that the physician should only associate with healthy people for fear of catching an infection. [Plain and simple.] Jesus is seeking the 'ill' who sense their [precarious] position before God [that all is not well between them], but the 'healthy' Pharisees do not want to be treated for something they do not recognize to be a disease [BECNT].²²

The [blunt] truth is that God cannot save those who refuse to see themselves as sinners, who ignore [deny], gloss over, or trivialize their [personal] sin. Only those who understand by the grace of God and the convicting work of the Holy Spirit that they are the poor, prisoners, blind, and oppressed, headed for a Christless, Godless eternity in hell [torment], and trust in Christ's work on the cross as payment in full for their sins (Col. 2:13–14) can be saved. As James wrote, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6).²³

D. He will die on behalf of them

³³ Then they (probably offended by Jesus' reply, changed to a different approach, but still referring to Jesus eating with the riffraff and) said to Him, "Why

²² Blight, R. C. (2008). *An Exegetical Summary of Luke 1-11* (2nd ed.) (210). Dallas, TX: SIL International.

²³ MacArthur, J. (2009). *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary Luke 1-5* (334). Chicago: Moody Publishers.

do the (spiritual) disciples (in their mind) of John fast often and make prayers, and likewise those of the (so called spiritual) Pharisees, but (in contrast to the “spiritual ones”) Yours (the riffraff) eat and drink?” (they are unfaithful to and disrespectful of the Jewish customs and therefore “unspiritual” they felt.)

[Don't you think that] It's more than just a little interesting that there was only one required day of fasting in the Old Testament, and that was The Day of Atonement. As was their practice, the Pharisees added to the requirements of the Law with their man made traditions and fasted twice a week, on Monday and Thursday [104 times a year], and elevated their tradition [above] God's mandate. It was not wrong to fast more often, but it was not required and ones spirituality was not measured by it.

It is equally interesting that Jesus uses the wedding feast [as we are about to see] in His association with His disciples as Jesus is our bridegroom and we, the church, gospel believes, are His bride.

³⁴ And He (Jesus) **said to them**, “**Can you** (inferring, honestly think that you must) **make the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them?** (expressing to the Pharisees that it would be ridiculous to try, and you yourselves, would think it was outrageous) ³⁵ **But the days will come when the bridegroom** (Jesus) **will be taken** (meaning forcefully taken) **away from them** (this is the first reference to Jesus' death); **then they will fast** (in mourning) **in those days.**”

When Christ shall leave them with their hearts full of sorrow, their hands full of work, and the world full of enmity and rage against them, *then shall they fast*, shall not be so well fed as they are now. ²⁴

Be of good cheer! Jesus:

- Stands up for you!
- Reaches out to you!
- Has high hopes for you!
- Died on behalf of you!

Believe and follow.

Give up your will and desires in order to devote yourself to His.

Jesus Reaches Out to the Pharisees Again

- I. The old works based system doesn't mix with the new grace based system
 - A. New cloth on an old garment doesn't work

Parable of the Cloth and Wineskins

³⁶ **Then He spoke a parable (with 3 illustrations) to them:**

(illustration #1) **“No one (cuts and) puts a piece from a new(ly acquired) garment on an old one; otherwise (if he does) the new makes a tear (the new one is ruined by the piece taken from it), and also the piece that was taken out of the new does not match the old (it will not match in strength nor in pliability—they will not complement each other, but resist each other. It's the same with the old and new covenant...works verses grace).**

- B. New wine in old wineskin doesn't work

³⁷ **And (illustration #2) no one puts new wine (that is fermenting) into old (stretched out and brittle) wineskins; or else the new wine will burst the wineskins and be spilled (lost and ruined), and the wineskins will be ruined (as well, for any use).** ³⁸ **But new (fermenting) wine must be put into new (flexible and strong) wineskins, and both (the wine and wineskins) are preserved.**

The Lord's point is that the gospel cannot be patched into Judaism (or any other system of salvation by work). His teaching was completely at odds with that of the Jewish leaders.

- They viewed themselves as righteous (Luke 16:15);
 - He preached the necessity of repentance (Luke 5:32; cf. Matt. 4:17).
- They were proud of their supposedly exalted religious status (Luke 20:46–47);
 - He proclaimed the need for humility (Matt. 5:3).
- They focused on external ceremony, ritual, and outward observance of the law;
 - He focused on the heart (Matt. 15:7–9; Luke 11:39–52).
- They loved the approval of men;
 - He offered the approval of God (Matt. 23:5–7; John 12:43).

The old garment in the Lord's illustration is not the Old Testament. It is not God's eternal law, which is holy, righteous, and good (Rom. 7:12), and which Jesus came to fulfill, not to replace (Matt. 5:17–19). Rather, it is the ritualistic,

legalistic religion based on rabbinic tradition, with its man-made regulations (Matt. 15:3–6) that obscured the Law of God. Jesus did not come to patch that system, but to replace it with the garment of salvation (Isa. 61:10)—the good news of salvation by faith in Him. No works-righteousness system can be patched into the gospel of grace and faith.²⁵

Like the first illustration, this one also highlights the futility and impossibility of mixing the gospel of grace with any system of works-righteousness. Grace is antithetical to and not compatible with any such system (Rom. 11:6; Gal. 5:4).²⁶

II. The old works based system is what you know the new grace based system is what you need to learn

³⁹ **And (illustration #3) no one, having drunk (having become accustomed to or tasted) old wine, immediately (right off the bat) desires new (they resist it as long as possible and would completely if they could); for he says (to himself), ‘The old is better.’ ”**

These traditional teachings had been passed on from generation to generation. It was to these (by this time) old rabbinical interpretations and applications of the law that the Pharisees of Jesus’ day were clinging. They preferred stuffiness to fresh air. That was thei

²⁵ MacArthur, J. (2009). The MacArthur New Testament Commentary Luke 1-5 (341–342). Chicago: Moody Publishers.

²⁶ MacArthur, J. (2009). The MacArthur New Testament Commentary Luke 1-5 (342). Chicago: Moody Publishers.