

LUKE

Leon L. Combs, M.A., M.Div., Ph.D.

Chapter Five

Luke now records Jesus doing a couple of miracles and calling some disciples. There is a similar fishing event discussed by John in his gospel (chapter 21) and some scholars think that they describe the same event. However there are too many differences in the details of the two events to warrant such a conclusion.

Luke 5:1-10

Now it happened that while the crowd was pressing around Him and listening to the word of God, He was standing by the lake of Gennesaret; (2) and He saw two boats lying at the edge of the lake; but the fishermen had gotten out of them and were washing their nets. (3) And He got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little way from the land. And He sat down and began teaching the people from the boat. (4) When He had finished speaking, He said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." (5) Simon answered and said, "Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but I will do as You say and let down the nets."

Lake Gennesaret is named after the ancient town of Gennesaret. It is a lake rather than a sea and it is also called the Sea of Galilee and the Sea of Tiberias. It is about 80 miles north of Jerusalem and is the largest body of fresh water in Israel. It is about 700 feet below sea level and is the world's lowest fresh water lake and the second lowest after the Dead Sea, whose surface is about 1300 feet below sea level. Its relationship[to Capernaum and some other towns is:



The crowd was intent on hearing more of the word of God from Jesus and they were pressing against Him near the sea. He needed to have some room to teach to them all so He looked for some way to do so. He noted two fishing boats near the edge of the lake where the fishermen

were cleaning their nets after a night of futile fishing. Jesus got into Peter's boat and asked him to go out a little distance into the lake so He could teach to the crowd. The usual way to teach was from a sitting position so Jesus sat in the boat to teach. When Jesus had finished teaching He told Peter to put the boat into deeper water so that they could fish. Peter seems to rebuke Jesus a little bit by telling Him that they (the professional fishermen) had fished all night and caught nothing. Night was the best time to fish and they were among the best at their jobs but he did obey the carpenter. He then let down the nets, perhaps not in the most cooperative manner for he obviously was not expecting to catch any fish.

Luke 5:6-11

When they had done this, they enclosed a great quantity of fish, and their nets began to break; (7) so they signaled to their partners in the other boat for them to come and help them. And they came and filled both of the boats, so that they began to sink. (8) But when Simon Peter saw that, he fell down at Jesus' feet, saying, "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!" (9) For amazement had seized him and all his companions because of the catch of fish which they had taken; (10) and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men." (11) When they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed Him.

To their amazement they caught a great quantity of fish in the nets so that their nets began to break. They called out to their partners to help with the fish and they came over and both boats began to fill with fish to the extent that they both began to sink. The number of fish is given in John but Luke does not think the number is so important as is the miraculous event. It is only here that Luke uses the compound name for Peter. Peter does not seem to welcome the great catch as he is caught up in the excitement of recognizing the miracle and his sinful state before Holy God. Peter was an expert fisherman so he was able to recognize the significance of this event as a miracle from God. Luke then goes on to the sequel to the miracle as Jesus told Peter to stop being fearful and He told him that from now on he would be catching men. The word translated catching actually means "catch alive" or "catch for life" and indeed that is the new order of life for Peter as he will be helping bring people to a life-giving relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Peter and his companions then left behind this tremendous catch of fish and all associated with it and followed Jesus.

Luke 5:12-14

While He was in one of the cities, behold, there was a man covered with leprosy; and when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and implored Him, saying, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean." (13) And He stretched out His hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing; be cleansed." And immediately the leprosy left him. (14) And He ordered him to tell no one, "But go and show yourself to the priest and make an offering for your cleansing, just as Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."

Leprosy was a dreaded disease that was disfiguring and fatal. The only defense against it was to quarantine those with it. People with the disease could not earn a living and so had to depend upon charity to survive until they died. The psychological effect was as deadly as the physical

aspects of it in that they could not associate with anyone else. They were ashamed of having it even though it was not their fault. Saying that the man was covered with leprosy indicates that it was in an extreme state. Luke does not locate the city and it was against the law for anyone with leprosy to come into a city (Lev 13:46) so Luke may have meant that the encounter was on the outskirts of the city. Note that the man implored Jesus as he stated that he knew Jesus could make him clean if he was willing to do so. Leprosy was a dirty disease and so to be healed meant to be cleansed. Nobody other than other lepers could have touched this man in years so the fact that Jesus touched him is remarkable and would have been very comforting to him. Jesus told him that He was indeed willing and commanded him to be cleansed. The result was an immediate cleansing of the disease. Jesus had already forbidden demoniacs from speaking of Him (4:31) and now He tells the man to only have a quiet religious rite. Perhaps Jesus wanted the man to keep quiet because He did not want the people to think of Him as the Messianic conqueror that the nationalists were expecting.

A priest would act as kind of health inspector and, if the priest determined the person to indeed be cleansed of the disease, a sacrifice would be offered and the person could reclaim his place in society (Lev 14). Such an event would state that people could now accept the person has indeed been cleansed of the disease and it meant that the power of God was at work in Jesus. The word “them” then means other society members who would be assured of the cleansing of the man from the disease.

Luke 5:15-17

But the news about Him was spreading even farther, and large crowds were gathering to hear Him and to be healed of their sicknesses. (16) But Jesus Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray. (17) One day He was teaching; and there were some Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting there, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem; and the power of the Lord was present for Him to perform healing.

However the news about the works of Jesus was spreading. Mark reports that the leper did spread the word: *“But he went out and began to proclaim it freely and to spread the news around, to such an extent that Jesus could no longer publicly enter a city, but stayed out in unpopulated areas; and they were coming to Him from everywhere.”* (Mark 1:45) Jesus found it necessary to leave the areas and retreat to the wilderness where He prayed continuously. In verse 17 Luke does not give the location of this event but Mark tells us it was in Capernaum: *When He had come back to Capernaum several days afterward, it was heard that He was at home.* (Mark 2:1). It was obvious that Jesus had a considerable reputation now for the Pharisees, who took their religion very seriously, had come to hear Him. The teachers of the law were the scribes who Christians emphasized their teaching of the law. These people had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem. Josephus numbers the Pharisees as about 6,000 so they were not very numerous but were very influential. Luke states that the power of the Lord was present for Jesus to perform healing to emphasize this aspect of the actions of Jesus.

Luke 5:18-20

And some men were carrying on a bed a man who was paralyzed; and they were trying to bring him in and to set him down in front of Him. (19) But not finding any way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down through the tiles with his stretcher, into the middle of the crowd, in front of Jesus. (20) Seeing their faith, He said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven you."

Mark tells us that there were four men bringing in the ill man: *And they *came, bringing to Him a paralytic, carried by four men.* (Mark 2:3) The huge crowds did not allow the men to bring their friend before Jesus so they used their ingenuity. Houses usually had flat roofs with stairs going up to them from the outside so the men brought the man to the roof. Mark does not tell about any tiles on the roof but gives some more details: *Being unable to get to Him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above Him; and when they had dug an opening, they let down the pallet on which the paralytic was lying.* (Mark 2:4) There is some debate about who the word “their” refers but it must include the men who brought the man to Jesus as well as the man on the stretcher for he must also have had faith for Jesus to proclaim that his sins were forgiven. Luke emphasizes the central issue of Jesus’s mission to forgive sins for He was not just a healer but the only one who had the authority to forgive sins.

Luke 5:21-26

The scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, "Who is this man who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?" (22) But Jesus, aware of their reasonings, answered and said to them, "Why are you reasoning in your hearts? (23) "Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins have been forgiven you,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? (24) "But, so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,"--He said to the paralytic--"I say to you, get up, and pick up your stretcher and go home." (25) Immediately he got up before them, and picked up what he had been lying on, and went home glorifying God. (26) They were all struck with astonishment and began glorifying God; and they were filled with fear, saying, "We have seen remarkable things today."

The scribes and Pharisees were experts on the law and they correctly stated that only God can forgive sins. However they did not inquire about the relationship between Jesus and the Father that would have also given Jesus that authority. Thus they incorrectly accused Jesus of blaspheming. Jesus knew their thoughts and answered their accusation. Of course it is easier to test the command “get up and walk” than to test whether or not someone’s sins have been forgiven. But Jesus is saying that He is doing far more than what any other healer could do. It is impossible for any other healer to forgive the sins of someone so what Jesus said is far more difficult of the two statements. The Jews of this day thought that all sin was associated with his sins so a sick person could not be cured until his sins were all forgiven. If they had been internally consistent they would have accepted that Jesus could forgive sins when He commanded the man to get up, take up his stretcher and go home!

This is Luke’s first use of the expression “Son of Man” that he will use 26 times. It is the favorite self-designation of Jesus as it is found over 80 times in the gospels. It is used only by Jesus

except by Stephen (Acts 7:56). It apparently is the only way Jesus thought that He could refer to His Messiahship without causing the people to think in terms of the nationalistic aspects of the Messiah they were expecting.

The man immediately showed that he had been healed. Only Luke comments that the man went forward glorifying God as he recognized the source of the healing and that he had then also been forgiven of his sins. The word “they” includes all of those present including the Pharisees and scribes who recognized that they had witnessed miracles that could not be explained by human terms.

Luke 5:27-32

After that He went out and noticed a tax collector named Levi sitting in the tax booth, and He said to him, "Follow Me." (28) And he left everything behind, and got up and began to follow Him. (29) And Levi gave a big reception for Him in his house; and there was a great crowd of tax collectors and other people who were reclining at the table with them. (30) The Pharisees and their scribes began grumbling at His disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with the tax collectors and sinners?" (31) And Jesus answered and said to them, "It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. (32) "I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

The toll booth would have been outside the city so saying that Jesus went out probably means that He left the city to find Levi who is referred to as Matthew in the other gospels. Jesus only told Levi to follow Him and he left all that he had to begin following Jesus. We must recognize the extreme effort of Levi to leave all that he had to follow Jesus. The fishermen could return to their profession but Levi could never go back to being a tax collector for he had forsaken that profession totally. He did still have possession of his house and he showed his devotion to Jesus by giving a big reception for Him. He invited all of his former fellow tax collectors for he wanted to witness to them how he had forsaken his former profession to follow Jesus. To the religious rulers the tax collectors were unclean and to associate with them meant that they would all be unclean. They stated their opposition to this party clearly by stating the impossibility of associating with unclean people and sinners. Jesus then proclaimed His mission that was to call sinners to repentance. The church is the only organization whose members are required to first proclaim their unworthiness for inclusion. Luke emphasizes repentance much more than Matthew or Mark (3:3, 8; 10:13; 11:32; 13:3; 15:7, 10; 16:30; 17:3-4; 24:47).

Luke 5:33-35

And they said to Him, "The disciples of John often fast and offer prayers, the disciples of the Pharisees also do the same, but Yours eat and drink." (34) And Jesus said to them, "You cannot make the attendants of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them, can you? (35) "But the days will come; and when the bridegroom is taken away from them, then they will fast in those days."

The Pharisees complained that Jesus and His disciples were too cheerful! They commented that the disciples of John and the Pharisees often fast and offer prayers contra to what they were seeing in this gathering. Jesus made no comment about prayers for He and His disciples often

prayed. He only commented about the eating and drinking. Jesus compared the present situation to a wedding party and the guests at such certainly do not fast but eat and drink because of the joy of being with the bridegroom. However Jesus does state that a time will come when the bridegroom will be taken away and then the disciples will offer voluntary fasting because of His absence. He seems to be referring to the coming Cross.

Luke 5:36-39

And He was also telling them a parable: "No one tears a piece of cloth from a new garment and puts it on an old garment; otherwise he will both tear the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old. (37) "And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled out, and the skins will be ruined. (38) "But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins. (39) "And no one, after drinking old wine wishes for new; for he says, 'The old is good enough.'"

Jesus then told them a parable about patching clothes and storing wine. The parable by Mark is only slightly different regarding the patch:

Mark 2:21-22 "No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; otherwise the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear results. (22) "No one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost and the skins as well; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins."

Both of these applications reveal that Jesus did not come to merely patch up some aspects of Judaism but He is teaching something radically new. He then states how difficult this new teaching will be for those who are used to drinking the old wine will not want to even try the new wine.