

## **Series Gospel of Luke**

### **This Message #8 Responding to Jesus**

#### **Scripture Luke 5:1-26**

In the previous two messages we learned about the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. His priority was "preaching the good news of the kingdom of God." The term, "the kingdom of God," refers to the rule of God which Jesus was to reestablish on earth.

We have thought about the first occasions in which Jesus set about establishing the rule of God. In Nazareth, Jesus presented Himself as the Messiah in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. His listeners recognized the authority of His words, but they objected to the arrogance of Jesus in identifying Himself as the Messiah.

On another occasion, in another location, Jesus performed miracles of healing and driving out demons. These supernatural activities confirmed the deity of Jesus and His ability to reverse the consequences of sin. The people affirmed this, saying, "with authority and power he gives orders to evil spirits and they come out."

By describing how Jesus repelled the temptations of the evil one, preached with authority, cast out unclean spirits and healed physical diseases, Luke is showing us that Jesus quickly validated His claim to be the Messiah of God.

Today we are going to study three more episodes which further confirm Jesus' authority and power.

#### **Read Luke 5:1-11**

This episode occurred quite early in the Galilean ministry of Jesus. However, it was not the first meeting of Jesus with Peter, James, John, and Andrew (*see Matthew 4:18*). Simon Peter had previously been introduced to Jesus by his brother, Andrew. Andrew had been with John the Baptizer one day when John had pointed to Jesus and said, "Look, the Lamb of God." Andrew had the opportunity that day to spend several hours with Jesus and then he went to find his brother, telling him, "We have found the Messiah" (*see John 1:35-42*).

Jesus spent a lot of His time in and around Capernaum, a city on the western shore of Lake Gennesaret, which is also known as the Sea of Galilee. Simon Peter's home was in Capernaum. He earned his living by fishing.

Luke mentions that the people were crowding around Jesus as He taught on the shore of the lake. In order to put a bit of space between Himself and the people, Jesus got into Simon Peter's boat. They anchored a few meters from the shore, and Jesus used the boat as His pulpit for teaching.

When the teaching was finished, Jesus instructed Peter to sail into deep water and to put out the nets in anticipation of a "catch" of fish. Jesus' instruction must have seemed unreasonable since these experienced fishermen had worked hard all night without anything to show for their efforts. Nevertheless, Peter followed Jesus' instruction and, contrary to his expectations, the crew gathered so many fish into the nets that they had to call to their partners, James and John, for assistance.

Both boats were filled to overcapacity and began to sink. Everyone was astonished. They recognized that something supernatural had happened. The miracle moved Peter to fall down before Jesus and call Him "Lord." This was a turning point in Peter's life. Not only did he have an overwhelming sense of who Jesus was, he also had a deep realization of his own sinfulness.

There are several accounts in Scripture of the reactions of individuals when confronted by the presence of God. For examples, after Isaiah saw the glory of God he cried out, "Woe is me! I am undone!" (*Isaiah 6:5*). Job exclaimed, "My eyes have seen You. Therefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes" (*Job 42:5-6*). The natural reaction of a person when confronted with the presence of God is to feel undone, unworthy, out of place. And so, with Peter, the incompatibility of his human sinfulness in the presence of God's holy glory was overwhelming.

Jesus understood the emotional state of Peter and responded with reassuring words, "Don't be afraid." Peter assumed he was unqualified to be with Jesus, but instead, Jesus announced that Peter would be among those who would serve with Him in kingdom work. "From now on you will catch men," He said.

Let me describe how Jesus calls people into ministry. Jesus has unique, specific, and personal ways of calling each person, even today, but there is a general pattern. First, He reveals Himself to the individual. Sometimes this is through an unusual circumstance like a miracle, but most often it is through His words. Jesus does this to generate faith and confidence in Who He is and what He can do. After revealing Himself He then issues an invitation, a call, something on the order of “Come, follow Me.” In other words, it is first necessary for us to know something about the nature and authority of Jesus and, on the basis of that information, it is expected that we will respond to Him in an appropriate way, by bowing before Him in awe and appreciation, and then moving out in obedience.

For Peter, there were several steps in the process of obedience. He had been introduced to Jesus by his brother (*John 1:40-42*). He had been present when Jesus performed His first miracle in Cana of Galilee (*John 2:1-11*). In the passage for today, he had to be willing to let Jesus use his boat as a teaching platform. He had to be willing to launch out into the deep waters and to let down his nets. These were steps which brought him to the point of experiencing the miracle of netting many fish, and of recognizing the deeper reality about the person of Jesus.

When Peter, Andrew, James, and John “pulled their boats up on shore, left everything, and followed Jesus,” it was their next logical step in the progression of obedient steps. They had learned enough to be convinced that Jesus was the Messiah, and it was time for them to make a commitment of their lives to Him. Their decision to follow Jesus was without hesitancy and irrevocable. They walked away from their possessions and their familiar lifestyle. Instead of catching fish for profit, they were ready to join Jesus in a ministry of bringing people into the kingdom of God. Three years later, after the resurrection and the Day of Pentecost, these fishermen became core leaders in the Church.

Now let’s turn to the second installment in our Scripture passage.

### **Read Luke 5:12-16**

In these verses Jesus ministered to a man who had an infectious skin disease. The word “leprosy” is a general term which refers to many kinds of skin problems. A person with an infectious skin disease was excluded by the Jewish Law from association with healthy people.

The regulations of the Law concerning infectious skin diseases are in Leviticus chapter 13. Verses 45-46 of that chapter summarize the restrictions on people with such diseases: "The person with such an infectious disease must wear torn clothes, let his hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of his face and cry out, 'Unclean! Unclean!' As long as he has the infection he remains unclean. He must live alone; he must live outside the camp."

The circumstances of people with infectious diseases were very sad. They were deprived of social interaction, employment, meaningful activity. They could not be with their families or friends. They often had to scrounge for their food among the garbage thrown out by other citizens. Many of the religious leaders assumed that the disease was a result of sinful behavior.

The man must have had some prior knowledge of Jesus because he recognized Him, bowed down before Him, and expressed his faith when he said, "If you are willing, you can make me clean."

Not only was Jesus willing to let the diseased man approach Him and interact with Him, but He was willing to reach out and actually touch the man. Jesus' willingness to help the man was indicative of His concern for all kinds of people, including the outcasts of society. It was very significant that Jesus touched the man since, according to the Law, such physical contact made a person ceremonially unclean. However, for Jesus, the law of love and compassion took precedence over the ceremonial laws of Judaism, and, in response to the man's plea for healing, Jesus said, "I am willing to help you. Be clean."

Luke mentions that the healing happened "immediately." Thus Jesus demonstrated once again His total authority over the consequences of sin.

Jesus did not want the man to tell anyone about the healing. His command followed the pattern from chapter 4, when He did not permit the demons to speak. Scripture does not explain why Jesus forbid people to speak about Him. Commentators assume that Jesus did not want enthusiastic multitudes to proclaim Him Messiah solely on the basis of His miraculous actions. As I have mentioned previously, the most important reason why Jesus came to earth was to die as the substitute sacrifice for sins. A popular uprising based on His healing activities, combined with the commonly held opinion among the Jews that the Messiah would be a political and military liberator, would have complicated His real spiritual purpose to deal with human sin and reestablish the kingdom of God on earth.

However, Jesus ordered the man to go show himself to the priest and to offer the sacrifices that the Old Testament Law demanded (*see Leviticus 14*). By fulfilling the requirements of the Law, the man could be declared ceremonially clean and allowed to reenter society. There was also a more significant reason; the priests would have evidence of Messianic activity. Such a supernatural healing had probably not happened in Israel since the time of the prophet Elisha, so the man who had been restored to wholeness would be a testimony to the religious leaders. He would be living proof of the power of God.

Jesus wanted to get the attention of the religious leaders, and the next episode explains what Jesus did when they came to check Him out.

### **Read Luke 5:17-26**

These verses indicate that the activities and teachings of Jesus had attracted the attention of the Pharisees and the Scribes, the teachers of the Law. There were not a few of them gathered in the house where Jesus was teaching. Luke mentions that they “had come from every village in Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem.” This is the first time the Pharisees are mentioned in Luke’s Gospel account. They came as critics to listen to and observe Jesus, and what they heard and saw proved to be quite remarkable. Luke made note that “The power of the Lord was present for Jesus to heal the sick.”

In particular, everyone’s attention was drawn to a paralytic who was lowered on a mat through the ceiling. When the men who were carrying the man could not find a way into the house because of the crowd of people, they resorted to the extreme method of climbing onto the roof of the house, creating an opening, and lowering the paralytic into the crowd, directly in front of Jesus. Houses in the Middle East typically had flat roofs, and many of them had an outside stairway, so we can picture in our minds how this group of men gained access to the roof.

It is not explained how they managed to remove roofing tiles in order to make an opening large enough to lower the paralyzed man who was lying on a mat. Based on the Middle Eastern construction methods I am familiar with, the men would have damaged the house in a substantial way, and would have showered a lot of dust and dirt on the people who were seated inside.

Jesus immediately took note of the faith of the men. Indeed, the men must have had exceptional faith in Jesus and confidence in what He would do; otherwise they would not have gone to so much trouble. Jesus somehow realized that the paralysis of the man on the mat was closely connected with some sin, and in stating, "Your sins are forgiven," He had targeted the root problem in the man's life. Perhaps forgiveness was the most important objective the man sought from Jesus. Perhaps he would have been satisfied to remain a paralyzed, albeit forgiven, man. We don't know.

What we do know is that Jesus used this occasion to reveal His true identity to the group of Pharisee observers. Their immediate reaction was that Jesus had spoken blasphemy. Blasphemy was, in Jewish law, a capital crime punishable by stoning. In the opinion of the Pharisees, a human who claimed to be like God defiled the divine nature of God. The Pharisees did not articulate their concerns, but Jesus understood their thoughts: Only God can forgive sins; Jesus is not God, therefore Jesus has spoken blasphemy.

Jesus, through His pronouncement of sins forgiven, was revealing Himself as one with God, and as God in flesh. Because the Pharisees did not recognize and would not accept that fact, Jesus challenged the Pharisees with a hypothetical dilemma: "Which is easier, to say 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'?" In one sense, each statement is easy enough to articulate, but the effects of only one statement were provable. No person is able to prove by observation the changes in an individual's inner spiritual condition, but when a real healing occurs, and paralyzed limbs become strong, and an individual who is confined to a mat is able to rise up and walk, then proof of miracle-working ability cannot be denied. And so, through the demonstration of His omnipotence in what could be seen, Jesus proved His authority in what could not be seen. Jesus thus proved to His critics that He had the "authority on earth to forgive sins."

On Jesus' command, the paralyzed man immediately stood up, rolled up his mat, and made his exit with a joyful heart. The faith of the paralyzed man and his friends led to the healing, and the healing was a dramatic witness to the Pharisees. Luke concludes the passage by stating that "everyone was amazed (dumbfounded!) and gave praise to God." I suspect that Luke was not including the Pharisees in that statement, even though they had seen the hopeless condition of the paralyzed man changed before their eyes.

This miracle was significant for several reasons. First, it showed that Jesus' authority extended not only over nature and demons and physical infirmity, but even to the forgiveness of sins. Second, the Jewish leaders came away from the event with a clear understanding of the claims that Jesus was making about Himself. They understood but they did not agree. In their opinion, the claims of Jesus were blasphemous. Third, it was obvious that some kind of divine transcendent power was operating through Jesus. This was an especially perplexing problem for the religious leaders because they believed that God would not work through a sinful person, and, in their opinion, Jesus was a sinner because of blasphemous statements. Finally, this episode, like the other episodes in chapter 5, showed the importance of faith. It was the faith of Peter and his associates that led to their call into ministry. It was the faith of the man with leprosy which led to his healing. It was the faith of the paralytic and his friends that motivated them to persevere through difficulties in order to approach Jesus, who responded to their faith with both spiritual and physical healing.

Questions:

- What do you think of Jesus?

If you are convinced that He is God, have you expressed your faith in Him? ("If you are willing, you can make me clean." "Be merciful to me, a sinner.")

If you have been made clean by Jesus, have you taken the next logical step and started to follow Him? Recognized His Lordship? Offered yourself for kingdom service?