

¹ On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, ² and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. Luke 5:1-2 Verses 1-11 are unique to Luke. The other Gospels tell of Jesus calling these disciples as they were mending their nets, but none tell the back story except Luke. The story begins one fine morning as a crowd had gathered to listen to Jesus teach. The water on the shore line was just beginning to ebb and flow back and forth rattling the stones on the shoreline. To one side were two sets of nets stretched out in the morning sun to dry.

I have an idea where this was, though we can't be certain. There is a little church called Peter of Primacy on the shore of Lake Kinneret. It is built over a limestone outcropping where it is believed Jesus called to His disciples after the resurrection, asking them if they caught any fish (John 21:4,5ⁱ). Ancient steps carved in the limestone still go from the shore up the outcropping. It would stand to reason that this first miraculous catch took place where the second one did, as the reason for the second miraculous catch was to remind them of the one we are reading about.

Standing on that same shore one day, I saw a boil of fish about seventy yards out. On another day we were on a boat and I asked the pilot if he would go there. He never did before because it was shallow and a bit out of the way, but one of the crew went to the bow and watched the depth as we approached that spot. They were going to demonstrate throwing a net. When the man did his demonstration, he was shocked to find three fish in the net. He had never caught a single fish in his years of demonstrating the technique until that moment.

³ Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. ⁴ And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." ⁵ And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." Luke 5:3-5 The crowd had Jesus backed right up to the water's edge, so Jesus climbed into one of the boats. He asked to Peter to push out a bit. Jesus sat down and continued to teach. The Gospel of John tells us that Peter and John already knew Jesus, John having returned from the baptism with Him. Apparently, they had gone back to work and did not yet realize they were to be fulltime disciples.

Once Jesus had finished preaching, He asked Peter to go out into deeper water and let down his net. Peter had set out these nets and pulled them in many times that previous night. They were wet and heavy. He was tired and anxious to dry the nets and put them away and get some sleep. Besides that, Jesus was a carpenter from Nazareth. What did He know about fishing? The tilapia in Galilee come up at night, not during the heat of the day. Peter hinted to Jesus that it was quite a demand, but since Jesus was the rabbi He would do what He asked.

Have you ever been convinced the Lord was asking you to do something you thought was inconsequential, an unnecessary effort, and took you out of your plan, but you did it anyway? Or maybe you didn't do it and wondered what would have happened if you did (Proverbs 3:5,6ⁱⁱ).

⁶ And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. ⁷ They signaled 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. Luke 5:6-7 Peter rowed out, let down the drag net, probably all the while thinking he would show Jesus a thing or two about fishing, and what a good follower he was even obeying when he knew it wouldn't... Wait a minute! What's happening? They were hanging onto the net with all their strength while calling to the other boat to come help. It took every ounce of strength to get the net pulled up to the boat and while some held it tight the others started scooping the fish into the boat. Then the other boat arrived and started scooping them in until both boats were so full of fish the edge of boat was

barely above the water line. Standing in the pile of flopping fish they carefully rowed back to shore.

⁸ But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." ⁹ *For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken,* Luke 5:8-9 Peter realized what had happened. He was ashamed of the thoughts that had gone through his mind. He didn't teach the rabbi about fishing. He got a lesson on much more than fishing. Peter, James, and John were called to something greater than being part-time disciples. Maybe they had thought they could help Jesus by earning a little money from their business. John Stott points out that religion is just fine for everyone as long as it stays in the few hours of Sunday morning, but when it invades our work world, or tells us to do something that isn't part of our plans, then it is going too far. It gets uncomfortable when He tells you to cast out into the deep when you wake up in the middle of the night, or are coming home from work, or on your way to do something you planned to do.

I'll give you a personal example. God wanted to demonstrate how great His grace is by calling me to preach. By that I mean He called an unlikely vessel to show that it is all the grace of God, so please realize this isn't about me. I was at an all-inclusive resort for a vacation. Food and drinks were included at five nice restaurants. We enjoyed a few days on the beach and restaurants, and then the Holy Spirit told me to fast. What?! I began to argue like Peter probably did. That can't be the Lord. That's a waste of the money I already paid. But the more I argued the more I was convicted that it was the Lord. I reluctantly obeyed, but that reluctance turned to excitement and anticipation. Now, unlike the disciples, I didn't see a great confirmation, but it did prepare me for things I would be facing when I returned. Sometimes we don't see the reason, but when we are sure the Spirit is speaking to us, we should obey regardless.

Peter looked at the fish and then at Jesus, whom I imagine was smiling a smile of understanding, and it dawned on Peter that Jesus was more than just one of the rabbis. Who can command nature? How was it possible? In the light of that amazing miracle Peter was afraid and could only see how sinful he was. That is the most common reaction when encountering the divine (Isaiah 6:5ⁱⁱⁱ). When faced with the supernatural we can't avoid our spiritual condition. This was just a preview of what was to come.

¹⁰ and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." ¹¹ *And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.* Luke 5:10-11 Jesus hadn't come to judge them, but to call them by grace to give up their occupation and follow Him as disciples (John 3:17^{iv}). They were to become His apostles, official representatives, after His departure. But first He was going to mentor them by having them live with Him for three years. That was the Jesus' seminary. They would eat, sleep, talk, minister, serve with their Master day in and day out. It is the best kind of training. Sometimes it is referred to as immersion training. They immersed themselves daily in the words and ways of Jesus.

When Jesus said to go into the world and make disciples (Matthew 28:19,20^v), He wasn't asking us to give people the gospel and tell them to go to church. **Jesus is asking us to invest our lives in others who would then do the same with others (2Timothy 2:2^{vi}).** Our lives should be able to stand up to the scrutiny of a new believer seeing our way of life day in and day out. If we would act differently with a guest in our home, we need to make those changes if they are there or not. Someone emailed me and said they hacked all my phone and laptop pictures and I should pay a ransom or they would publish them. I emailed back, "Please do!" If you have nothing to hide, you have nothing to fear.

Jesus chose the right men, for they were willing to leave everything and follow Him (Luke 18:28^{vii}). That is not always the call to everyone. Some people are to represent Jesus in their place of work. Others might change careers to one in which they can be more of a witness. But whatever the call upon our lives, Jesus is to be first above our occupation, our possessions,

and even our family (Matthew 10:37^{viii}). Discipleship is defined by Jesus in Luke 14:33^{ix} as forsaking all and following Him. We know from Paul's teaching that this does not necessarily mean walking away from everything, but rather making Jesus first in all things (Romans 6:6^x). A disciple is one who learns from their master and follows wherever he leads. The first century disciples of a rabbi served their rabbi while learning his responses, prayers, and way of life.

Are you living with Jesus each day, or like these disciples here, are you a part-time follower? Can you sing, "All to Jesus I surrender, all to Him I freely give"? Have you made Him first in everything? If so, you will soon be catching men and discipling them to do the same.

Jesus and the disciples had moved on to one of the cities to which Jesus had said He must go to preach the kingdom (4:43^{xi}). *12 While he was in one of the cities, there came a man full of leprosy. And when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and begged him, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean."* Luke 5:12 Luke describes the man they encountered as being full of leprosy. While this one term was used for all skin diseases, by describing him as "full of leprosy" we can assume he has what we refer to as Hansen's disease in its advanced stages where one's extremities have no feeling. Because there is no feeling, infection goes unnoticed. Doctor Paul Brand found that one of the main causes of bodily damage of lepers in third world countries was from rats. His first advice to lepers is to keep a cat in their room at night. This man must have had damage to his body in many places. Fingers, toes, nose, and ears are the first to go. Dr. Brand points out that the gift of pain is really a blessing. The lepers' inability to feel is what allows the damage to take place unnoticed. The damage then becomes infected and then decays.

In Jesus' day there were not only biblical restrictions that isolated the leper from society (Leviticus 13:45-46^{xii}) but also numerous rabbinical rules that made their lives even more humiliating. It is difficult to contract leprosy from one who has the disease, but it is possible. Isolation prevented it. They had to cry out that they were unclean when people were near. The society concluded that they were being judged for some great sin, for that was the affliction from God on the sins of Miriam, Gehazi, and Uzziah (Numbers 12:10^{xiii}; 2Kings 5:27^{xiv}; 2Chronicles 26:19^{xv}). They were forbidden from being in cities, but this leper had to get to Jesus even at the risk of being stoned.

He fell prostrate before Jesus and declared that if Jesus willed it, He could make him clean. The leper called Jesus "Lord" and believed Jesus could do whatever He willed. This leper agreed with society that his outward condition was because of his inward corruption, though it was not always the case. He wanted to be clean within so that he would be healed.

13 And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I will; be clean." And immediately the leprosy left him. Luke 5:13 Jesus reached down and touched him. How many years had it been since the leper had human contact? Jesus touched him like He had touched those in Capernaum. The Law declared that if you touched a leper you were also unclean for a certain amount of time. But Jesus cannot be unclean. He is the holy One (Exodus 39:27^{xvi}). At the point of contact the leper had to be whole or Jesus would have been considered unclean.

Jesus statement is so concise. "I will; be clean!" Be clean is a single word in Greek (*katharisthi*). BOOM! The leper was whole and free of the disease. Fingers, toes, nose, ears, patches of skin and all, completely whole and clean, with every nerve restored immediately. Wait - slow that down and freeze frame to the point of contact. Go back a frame, and then forward, maimed, whole, maimed, whole. What a sight to behold! It reminds me of seeing people at the moment they are born-again.

In one sense this man's leprosy was a blessing. He realized his inner corruption. Most people today are completely blind to how God sees our depraved souls. When the man looked at his body he thought of how rotten his heart was before God. Oh, that we had eyes to see as God sees. Nothing short of a revelation of our sin will cause us to fall on our faces before Jesus and humbly ask to be cleaned. **Have you ever asked God to show you how He sees your heart (Psalm 139:23,34^{xvii})?**

Do you know that this is what Jesus can do to our sin sick souls when we come to Him and fall on our face and beg, "Look, if you will, you can make me clean"? He reaches down and touches us and immediately our sins are removed as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12^{xviii}). Outwardly there is no visible change like the leper experienced, except the exuberant joy on our faces, but inwardly we are clean, a new creation in Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:17^{xix}). We begin a transformation into the likeness of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:11^{xx}).

¹⁴ And he charged him to tell no one, but "go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as Moses commanded, for a proof to them." Luke 5:14 Jesus charged Him to tell no one. While Jesus healed all who came to Him as evidence that He is God who heals us, His main mission was to teach and prepare the disciples to proclaim the Gospel after His ascension. The physical demands of the multitudes could easily interfere with that.

This spiritual cleansing is pictured in what the Law told the priest to do to the leper who is restored to health. Kent Hughes describes it so well that I will quote him here. *In Biblical times the rare deliverances from leprosy were certified by an elaborate and uniquely joyful ceremony that extended over eight full days in fulfillment of the directives of Leviticus 14. It began when a priest met the would-be celebrant outside the camp and verified that he actually was healed. Then, still outside the camp, two birds were presented along with some cedar wood, scarlet yarn, and hyssop. One of the birds was killed in a clay pot (so that none of its blood was lost). This was done above fresh water (symbolic of cleansing). Next the live bird, along with the wood, yarn, and hyssop, was dipped in the blood, and blood was sprinkled upon the leper seven times as he was pronounced "clean." This initial ceremony concluded with the live bird being released in the open fields to wing its way to freedom (Leviticus 5:1-7). As a result, the blood-sprinkled person could once again join the community. This foreshadowed the effect of Christ's blood, which reconciles man to God and makes it possible for the sinner to join the household of faith.*

After the bird's release the cleansed man washed his clothing, shaved the hair from his body, bathed, and entered the camp, where he, his family, and friends rejoiced for seven days (Leviticus 5:8, 9). On the seventh day his head, eyebrows, and beard were shaved, and he again bathed, so that, like a newborn, he was ready to enter a new phase of his existence.

On the eighth day the former leper offered three unblemished lambs as a guilt offering, a sin offering, and a burnt offering. The guilt offering was not an atoning sacrifice but a restitution for the offerings and sacrifices he was unable to make while a leper. His restitution and fresh commitment were then dramatically emphasized when the priest took some of the blood and smeared it on the offerer's right ear, thumb, and toe, then coated each smear with a second anointing of oil, thereby symbolizing that the man would listen to God's voice, use his hands for God's glory, and walk in God's ways. Fittingly, his shaved head was then anointed with the remaining oil (Leviticus 5:12-18; cf. Exodus 30:23-25). Finally, having thus declared the leper to be in the Lord's service, the priest made atonement for him with sin, burnt, and cereal offerings, the last being a joyous expression of gratitude (Leviticus 14:19, 20).

Imagine the joy of the healed man and his family—and the communal celebration that accompanied that great eighth day. It was as if a resurrection had taken place. Very likely there was feasting and singing long into the night.

For us Christians, the Old Testament's description of these ancient ceremonies elicits incredible joy not only because the Scriptures speak of Christ (cf. Luke 24:27; John 5:39), but also because this elaborate ritual specifically speaks of the atonement through Christ and his power to deliver. This is precisely what Jesus' healing of the leper in Luke 5 is all about. Hughes, Kent - Preaching the Word – Luke, Volume I: That You May Know the Truth.

¹⁵ But now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities. Luke 5:15 The crowds did gather both to hear and be healed. There was a big need for both. Medicine could do little for the many physical ailments

of the day and the teaching of the scribes was dry and lifeless (Matthew 7:29^{xxi}). Jesus poured Himself out, day after day to the multitudes who came to Him in faith.

¹⁶ *But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray.* Luke 5:16 Ministry is demanding. I can't imagine the demand it daily placed on Jesus. We can see how weary He became in several passages. In Samaria He sat by the well and rested while the disciples went to find food (John 4:6^{xxii}). In a storm on the lake He was sound asleep on the ballast (Luke 8:22-23^{xxiii}). But Jesus knew His strength was not in physical rest, for He was up before dawn to be alone with His Father in prayer (Mark 1:35^{xxiv}). In this verse, the Greek tense tells us this was an ongoing action that He took regularly. He regularly found places where He would be uninterrupted while He communed with His Father.

This tells me that we must do the same if we are to have the direction and strength to serve as we should. Jesus told us to go into our closet and close the door and pray to our Father in secret (Matthew 6:6^{xxv}). Don't bring your phone or anything else that would distract you. Learn to pour out your heart and wait on Him to answer. The only thing I would recommend that you have is your Bible. The answers usually come from the Scriptures. Learn to pray with your Bible open before you. It is a discipline. The flesh hates it, but the spirit in you loves it. Prayer is an essential part of the life of every servant of Jesus who would be effective for Him (Colossians 4:2^{xxvi}).

In these two accounts Peter and this leper both recognized the wretchedness of their sins. They both realized Jesus was the answer. They both humbled themselves before Him. They were both transformed by His response. It can be the same for anyone who will come to Him in the same way. No matter how arrogant or rotten you have been, Jesus longs to begin His sanctifying work in you, to give you the joy of the cleansed leper and the call to catch men.

Questions

- 1 What was Peter doing when Jesus started teaching?
- 2 Why was he reluctant to do what Jesus asked?
- 3 What did he learn?
- 4 How desperate was the leper?
- 5 How did he see himself?
- 6 What did Jesus touch do?
- 7 Describe the Levitical procedure when a leper was well.
- 8 What does that picture?
- 9 Why did Jesus ask him not to tell anyone?
- 10 Where did Jesus find strength to face the demands of His ministry?

ⁱ **John 21:4-5 (ESV)**

⁴ Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus.

⁵ Jesus said to them, "Children, do you have any fish?" They answered him, "No."

ⁱⁱ **Proverbs 3:5-6 (ESV)**

⁵ Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.

⁶ In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

ⁱⁱⁱ **Isaiah 6:5 (KJV)**

⁵ Then said I, Woe *is* me! for I am undone; because I *am* a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.

^{iv} **John 3:17 (KJV)**

¹⁷ For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

^v **Matthew 28:19-20 (ESV)**

¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

vi **2 Timothy 2:2 (KJV)**

2 And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.

vii **Luke 18:28 (ESV)**

28 And Peter said, “See, we have left our homes and followed you.”

viii **Matthew 10:37 (ESV)**

37 Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

ix **Luke 14:33 (ESV)**

33 So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

x **Romans 6:6 (ESV)**

6 We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.

xi **Luke 4:43 (ESV)**

43 but he said to them, “I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose.”

xii **Leviticus 13:45-46 (ESV)**

45 “The leprous person who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose, and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, ‘Unclean, unclean.’”⁴⁶ He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease. He is unclean. He shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp.

xiii **Numbers 12:10 (ESV)**

10 When the cloud removed from over the tent, behold, Miriam was leprous, like snow. And Aaron turned toward Miriam, and behold, she was leprous.

xiv **2 Kings 5:27 (ESV)**

27 Therefore the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and to your descendants forever.” So he went out from his presence a leper, like snow.

xv **2 Chronicles 26:19 (ESV)**

19 Then Uzziah was angry. Now he had a censer in his hand to burn incense, and when he became angry with the priests, leprosy broke out on his forehead in the presence of the priests in the house of the LORD, by the altar of incense.

xvi **Exodus 29:37 (ESV)**

37 Seven days you shall make atonement for the altar and consecrate it, and the altar shall be most holy. Whatever touches the altar shall become holy.

xvii **Psalms 139:23-24 (ESV)**

23 Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!

24 And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!

xviii **Psalms 103:12 (ESV)**

12 as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

xix **2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)**

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

xx **2 Corinthians 4:11 (ESV)**

11 For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

xxi **Matthew 7:29 (ESV)**

29 for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.

xxii **John 4:6 (ESV)**

6 Jacob’s well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour.

xxiii **Luke 8:22-23 (ESV)**

22 One day he got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side of the lake.” So they set out,²³ and as they sailed he fell asleep. And a windstorm came down on the lake, and they were filling with water and were in danger.

^{xxiv} **Mark 1:35 (ESV)**

³⁵ And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.

^{xxv} **Matthew 6:6 (ESV)**

⁶ But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

^{xxvi} **Colossians 4:2 (ESV)**

² Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.