



## The Gospel of Luke - Chapter Five

### IV. Luke 4:16-9:50 - The Ministry of Jesus in Galilee (continues)

#### IV.a Luke 4:16-5:16 - The beginning (continues/concludes)

##### Summary of Chapter Five

Jesus was teaching by the Lake of Galilee. The people began crowding him and he felt pressed upon, so he had Simon, a local fisherman and boat-owner, take him out a short way so that he could sit down in the boat to teach the crowd.

After Jesus had finished teaching, he instructed Simon to go out into deeper water and let down his nets to catch some fish. Peter replied that they had fished all night and caught nothing but he did as the Lord requested anyway, which is always a smart thing to do. The resulting catch was huge. Simon immediately knelt down and confessed his sins before Jesus and said that he was not worthy to have the Lord with him.

In Luke's account, Simon later named Peter or Cephas meaning a rock, became the first disciple that Jesus called. Although not explicitly stated by Luke, it is likely that Andrew, John and James also became disciples at this time as they were partners in the catch. They would now become fishers of men.

Large crowds continued to follow Jesus and he continued to heal people as required. The friends of one man were so desperate for his healing that they climbed onto the roof, took part of it off and lowered him in on a stretcher. When Jesus told the man his sins were forgiven, the Pharisees began talking against Jesus stating, quite correctly of course, that only God had the power and authority to forgive sins.

Jesus then chose Levi or Matthew, a tax collector, as a disciple. This also upset the Pharisees, as tax collectors were held in low regard and considered among the worst of sinners. Jesus reminded the Pharisees that it is the sick that need a doctor; and it was to the sick that he came.

Jesus proclaimed that he had come to earth to call sinners back to God. He continued his ministry in Galilee.

#### IV.a.iv Luke 5:1-11 - The calling of the first disciples

Jesus calls common fishermen to leave everything and become his disciples as fishers of men as confirmed in v.10. Jesus precedes the call by demonstrating his authority through the

miraculous catch of fish. This account precedes Chapter 4 but again Luke does not need to follow true chronology but focuses on themes.

<sup>1</sup> One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the people crowding round him and listening to the word of God,

#### Luke 5:1

Lake of Gennesaret is the Sea of Galilee and was later named Lake Tiberius after the Roman emperor.

Crowding round him suggests physical contact. The Jewish leaders and teachers would never allow themselves to be in a similar situation with common people but Jesus frequently does and indeed relishes being among the people. This was another factor why the Jewish social elite would not take note of who was among them.

<sup>2</sup> he saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. <sup>3</sup> He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

#### Luke 5:2-3

He got into one of the boats, he sat down and taught. As we see in Mark 4:1-2a <<Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water's edge. He taught them many things by parables>>.

<sup>4</sup> When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch. <sup>5</sup> Simon answered, Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.

#### Luke 5:4-5

Let down the nets, Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. Simon's reply to Jesus' command should not be seen as one of disrespect, in light of his addressing him as master, which he often does, as we see in Luke 8:24, 8:45, 9:33, 9:49 & 17:13. This is also confirmed when he immediately adds: but because you say so or at your word I will let down the nets.

<sup>6</sup> When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. <sup>7</sup> So they signalled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.

#### Luke 5:6-7

The large number of fish is dramatised by their nets began to break and their signalling to their partners to come and help them.

That both boats began to sink further emphasises the great catch of fish. Jesus' miracle demonstrates that he is Lord of the sea and all that is in it. This sign is similar to changing the

water into wine in John Chapter 2 to help the disciples have faith in him. John records that: <<Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book>> (John 20:30).

<sup>8</sup> When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man! <sup>9</sup> For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken,

#### Luke 5:8-9

Simon's reaction is appropriate for times when God himself appears to someone. Other examples of this are found in Isaiah 6:1-8 <<In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory'. At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. "Woe to me!" I cried. 'I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty'. Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for". Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!" >>, and in Ezekiel 1:28 <<Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. When I saw it, I fell facedown, and I heard the voice of one speaking>>.

He fell down at Jesus' knees in the midst of the fish asking the Lord to go away from him lest he be judged as a sinful man.

Peter was astonished by the miracle as a demonstration of the presence of God, which was the first step in understanding who Jesus is. At this point, Peter simply understands that God works through Jesus, though he will come to a much deeper understanding as time unfolds, as we see in Mark 8:29 by these words: <<"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Christ" >>. But it is only after the resurrection that Peter and the disciples fully understand who Jesus is and we will see this confirmed in the final chapter of Luke's Gospel.

<sup>10</sup> and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men.

#### Luke 5:10

Don't be afraid, or 'Fear not' as in some translations, is something we first encountered in Luke 1:13. It is a natural reaction for most humans when they encounter the supernatural, but God and his angels always try to allay that fear.

Catch men builds on the analogy of catching fish. It means bringing people into the Kingdom of God and into relationship with Jesus.

<sup>11</sup> So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

## Luke 5:11

The account of calling Peter, probably with his brother Andrew too, as the first disciples followed by John and James is similar to that found in Matthew 4:18 and Mark 1:16. John, however, records in John 1:37 that he and Andrew were the first to be called. The difference in the sequence has no real impact on the telling of the Gospel message.

### IV.a.v Luke 5:12-16 - The man with leprosy

Luke may have placed this account here due to the similarity between the events described in v.8 and v.12. This is almost certainly the same account given in Matthew Chapter 8 and Mark Chapter 1.

<sup>12</sup> While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the ground and begged him, Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.

## Luke 5:12

Covered with, or, in some translations, full of leprosy, reminds us of how we are in our sin before we were miraculously healed and set free.

Leprosy comes from the Greek term *lepra* and included a variety of serious skin diseases and was not limited to what is today called leprosy or Hansen's disease. The OT provided specific guidelines for the examination and treatment of those with a variety of skin diseases generally called leprosy, many of which were highly contagious and is dealt with in detail in Leviticus Chapters 13-14.

Fell with his face to the ground. A position of reverence and we will see this response again from another leper in Luke 17:16, where it says: <<He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him – and he was a Samaritan>>.

If you are willing, you can make me clean. The miracle reveals Jesus' authority to cure the ritual uncleanness of the leper. We will see this confirmed in Luke 5:17-26 with regard to Jesus' authority to forgive the spiritual uncleanness of sin.

<sup>13</sup> Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. I am willing, he said. Be clean! And immediately the leprosy left him.

## Luke 5:13

Be clean! It is only a single word in Greek *katharisthēti*; and is required to effect the miracle. Jesus is not made unclean by touching the leper. Instead, the leper is cleansed by Jesus' touch.

<sup>14</sup> Then Jesus ordered him, Don't tell anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.

## Luke 5:14

Don't tell anyone. Jesus carefully avoids stirring up a misunderstanding of his messianic identity. Although miracles attest to the authenticity of his message concerning the kingdom's arrival, he does not want to draw crowds who come simply for the sake of miracles.

Go, show yourself to the priest as Moses commanded. The rationale for this instruction is found in Leviticus 14:2-32. We see the first part of this statement again in Luke 17:14 with these words: <<When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests". And as they went, they were cleansed>>. This was to serve as a testimony or proof to them, i.e. the people, and probably the priests as well.

As a result of Jesus' healing, the former leper is brought back into full participation and fellowship in the Jewish community according to the provisions of the Mosaic Law.

<sup>15</sup> Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses.

#### Luke 5:15

All the more. Jesus' fame spreads as we saw in Luke 4:37 <<And the news about him spread throughout the surrounding area>>.

To hear him and to be healed. Luke places Jesus' preaching ministry before his healing ministry. We will see this again in Luke 6:18, for example: <<He went down with them and stood on a level place. A large crowd of his disciples was there and a great number of people from all over Judæa, from Jerusalem, and from the coastal region around Tyre and Sidon, who had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. Those troubled by impure spirits were cured>>.

<sup>16</sup> But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

#### Luke 5:16

Jesus often withdrew, and prayed. The Greek construction indicates a continual practice and could also be translated 'was regularly withdrawing and praying'. The increasing crowds, the unceasing demands on Jesus' time, and the fact that no one else could duplicate his ministry, did not deter Jesus from spending extensive time in prayer.

Lonely places would be places of solitude and peace, where he would be in communion with the Father. There is never any need for a believer in Christ to be lonely or to feel alone.

### IV.b Luke 5:17-6:11 - The beginning of controversy

Luke returns to the theme of opposition to Jesus as seen in Luke 4:28-30 by including five accounts of controversy, which is confirmed in Mark 2:1-3:6.

#### IV.b.i Luke 5:17-26 - Jesus heals a paralytic

Jesus provides divine proof that he has not only the power to heal but also the authority to forgive sins.

<sup>17</sup> One day as he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law, who had come from every village of Galilee and from Judæa and Jerusalem, were sitting there. And the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick.

#### Luke 5:17

The Pharisees were the most influential of the three major Jewish sects. A relatively small but highly influential group of Jews, who emphasised meticulous observance of God's law as

understood both from the OT laws and from their accumulated extra-biblical traditions. Such observance was seen as the means by which one attains righteousness before God and retains his favour. Many Pharisees opposed Jesus, as recorded in Matthew 23:1-36, where Jesus condemns their hypocrisy, but some followed him.

The Pharisees resided primarily in Jerusalem and were divided into at least three schools: the disciples of Shammai, Hillel and Gamaliel. These schools were especially concerned about the proper administration of the temple.

The disciples of Shammai, who represented the more conservative wing of the group, were dominant before the destruction of the temple in AD70 (Mishnah, Shabbat 1:4). But Hillel, representing a more liberal interpretation of the Jewish scriptures, had moved from Babylon to Jerusalem about a generation before Jesus, and had gained wide influence as well.

Gamaliel, the son or possibly grandson of Hillel, was a renowned teacher of the law in Jerusalem. The apostle Paul had been a disciple of Gamaliel, which Paul himself confirms in Acts 22:3. Gamaliel is remembered for his wisdom when dealing with the disciples in Acts 5:34, and with careful management of the Jewish calendar. Most Jews followed a lunar-solar calendar, which consisted of 12 lunar months, totalling 354 days. Every three years or so, a thirteenth month had to be added in order to bring the average total days of the year up to the 365.25 days of the solar year. Otherwise, the seasons would not have matched the festivals and sacrifices in the temple.

Gamaliel determined when to add the thirteenth month (Mishnah, Rosh Hashshanah 2:8; and Sanhedrin 2:6). Ironically, if the Galatian Christians had adopted the calendar of Jewish religious holidays advocated by Paul's opponents, as referred to in Galatians 4:10, they would have found themselves under the authority of his old teacher!

These three schools attempted to shape the religious life of the ordinary Jew through the dissemination of their traditions and is recorded in Matthew 23:15 and Mark 7:1-13. It is also confirmed by Josephus in Jewish Antiquities 13.297. Galilee was also part of their mission. The Jerusalem Talmud (Shabbat 15d) claims that Johanan ben Zakkai, a disciple of Hillel, spent 18 years, probably from AD20 to about AD40, teaching in the Galilaean town of Araba or Gabara. So Johanan and Jesus were teaching in Galilee at the same time.

The Pharisees also had considerable influence over local scribes who would preach in the synagogue according to their interpretations, see Matthew 7:29, 23:1-2 and Mark 2:16. When the Pharisees in Jerusalem were alerted by some scribes that Jesus was preaching a new teaching with authority, they sent a delegation which, after observing some alarming behaviours, attributed his miraculous powers to Beelzebul noted in Mark 3:22. Since the Pharisees were highly respected by the people, the accusation could have had devastating consequences for Jesus' mission, and resulted in Jesus denouncing woes on several local towns as recorded in Matthew 11:20-24.

The Pharisaic tradition was pragmatic and relevant to the needs of the time. For instance, the Law of Moses requires all loans to be forgiven in the sabbatical or seventh year as detailed in Deuteronomy 15:2. The intention was to provide relief for borrowers but the reality was that lenders refused to give loans near the seventh year. Hillel addressed the problem by establishing the prosbol, a contract that requires a borrower to pay back a lender even in the seventh year (Mishnah, Shabbat 7:1). His school was also highly pragmatic when it came to rules for divorce, at least for husbands wanting a divorce, interpreting the ambiguous phrase in Deuteronomy 24:1 <<finds something indecent about her>> as allowing a husband to divorce his wife for almost any reason, including burning his

dinner (Mishnah, Gittin 9:10). However, the school of Shammai interpreted the law more narrowly, allowing divorce only in the case of adultery.

The Dead Sea Scrolls accuse the Pharisees of being 'Seekers of Smooth Things', i.e. passing on easy interpretations to the people as in Isaiah 30:10, which claims: <<They say to the seers, "See no more visions!" and to the prophets, "Give us no more visions of what is right! Tell us pleasant things, prophesy illusions>>.

While Jesus too was vulnerable to this criticism, at least in some areas of his teaching, especially his indifference to matters of ritual purity and Sabbath observance, he is even more stringent than Moses when it comes to justice. Instead of recommending the prosbol, he flatly commands his disciples: <<Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you>> (Matthew 5:42). Concerning divorce he adopts a similar position to the school of Shammai but also notes that divorce was not God's original plan and is not required: <<It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce'. But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery>> (Matthew 5:31-32), and: <<I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery>> (Matthew 19:9).

The difference in stringency can be further illustrated by the summations of the law provided by Hillel and Jesus. Hillel says "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbour: that is the whole Torah, while the rest is commentary thereof; go and learn it" (Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 31a). Jesus says: <<So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets>> (Matthew 7:12). We find the negative wording of Hillel's teaching in earlier Jewish writings, such as Tobit 4:15 and Philo, Hypothetica 7.6-8. Jesus' summation is more challenging, requiring nothing less than a universal love of all people including one's enemies as pronounced in Matthew 5:44.

However, despite the curious quality of some of their traditions, the Pharisees were especially scrupulous to maintain a righteous status before God. Many were probably like Paul who claimed that, as a Pharisee, he was blameless as to the Law of Moses. Paul, himself a zealous Pharisee, recorded these words: <<as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless>> (Philippians 3:6). While many Jews tithed, Pharisees even tithed their garden herbs as noted in Matthew 23:23. While others fasted periodically, they fasted twice a week stated in both Mark 2:18 and Luke 18:12. They also maintained purity at their meals to the point of 'straining out a gnat' from a cup as referred to in Matthew 23:24, and confirmed in Mark 7:4, and they avoided sharing a table with sinners, those like tax collectors who habitually broke the law. Examples are found in Mark 2:16 and Luke 7:39.

All three expressions of piety come together in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18:9-14. Jesus depicts the Pharisee as distinguishing himself from the tax collector because he fasted and tithed in order to retain a righteous status before God. Jesus affirms tithing but claims the Pharisees neglect the 'weightier matters of the law', such as justice, mercy and faithfulness as recorded in Matthew 23:23.

The Pharisees took their personal relationship with God seriously, in part, because they believed that the resurrection of the dead was a reward for living a righteous life, this is according to Josephus, Jewish War 2.163, Jewish Antiquities 18.14, Acts 23:8 and Aboth of Rabbi Nathan 5A. But Jesus says: <<For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom

of heaven>> (Matthew 5:20). On another occasion, he tells the Pharisaic teacher Nicodemus that he needs to be born again or born from above in John 3:3.

Despite the blameless way of life many Pharisees pursued, such efforts in Jesus' view was not enough. Like all people, they needed to repent and believe in the Gospel. From this perspective, Paul could anticipate being found by God at the resurrection: <<and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith>> (Philippians 3:9).

Teachers of the law is a synonym for scribes who were experts in handling written documents. In Israel, scribes' duties included teaching, interpretation and regulation of the law. They were considered to be official interpreters of the OT.

From every village indicates Jesus' great fame.

<sup>18</sup> Some men came carrying a paralytic on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. <sup>19</sup> When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus.

Luke 5:18-19

They went up on the roof. Houses in ancient Palestine often had external stairs leading up to a flat roof. We see this also in the OT as well as the NT eras: <<One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace>> (1 Samuel 11:2a), and: <<Peter went up on the roof to pray>> (Acts10:9b).

Through the tiles. Some have claimed that Luke erred in saying that the roof had tiles. Although tiles were not widely used at this time, evidence exists that they were in fact used for some roof construction in Palestine, suggesting that this may have been a wealthy person's house. In addition, typical mud roofs were made from slabs of mud, first baked in the sun, then carried to the roof and Luke may have called these tiles.

<sup>20</sup> When Jesus saw their faith, he said, Friend, your sins are forgiven.

Luke 5:20

Their faith. Their is plural and most naturally refers to the faith of the friends, who brought the paralytic to Jesus but may include the faith of the paralytic as well. James 5:15 states: <<And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven>>. This is not the faith of the sick person but the faith of those praying. In this instance, James mentions no requirement for the sick person to exercise faith, i.e. he or she does not have to be a believer, only that they call for the elders.

Your sins are forgiven. By proclaiming the man's sins forgiven, Jesus is announcing that he has the authority to forgive sins. He then demonstrates this authority by healing the man (v.24). It also reflects God's view on sin as he sees it more important to remove sin than to provide physical healing.

<sup>21</sup> The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?

<sup>22</sup> Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, Why are you thinking these things in your hearts?

#### Luke 5:21-22

The Pharisees and the teachers of the law or scribes are often paired together in the Gospels. Jesus calls his disciples to a different kind and quality of righteousness than that of the scribes and Pharisees. They took pride in outward conformity to many extra-biblical regulations, but still had impure hearts. The scribes and Pharisees seem more intent on convicting Jesus of breaking ceremonial law, than they were at hearing what he had to say, which would have been eternally beneficial to them.

Jesus does not deny that God alone can forgive sins, but claims that he has the authority, as the Son of Man, to forgive sins (v.24). If this were not true then Jesus would be guilty of blasphemy.

Jesus knew what they were thinking is an indication of divine omniscience as confirmed in Matthew 9:4 <<Knowing their (i.e. the teachers of the law) thoughts, Jesus said, "Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts?>>, and, in the same account recorded in Mark 2:8 <<Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, "Why are you thinking these things?>>.

<sup>23</sup> Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven', or to say, 'Get up and walk'?

<sup>24</sup> But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. He said to the paralysed man, I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.

#### Luke 5:23-24

Jesus' counter-question involves the difference between saying and doing. It is easier to say that a person's sins are forgiven, which *cannot* be disproved, than to tell him to rise up and walk, which *can* be disproved.

Jesus' healing of the paralytic thus serves as proof that you may know that he, as the Son of Man, has the authority to forgive sins.

Son of Man is Jesus' favourite self-designation indicating the true meaning of his identity and ministry:

1. The humble servant: who has come to forgive common sinners and is confirmed in Matthew 9:6.
2. The suffering servant: whose atoning death and resurrection will redeem his people, see Luke 16:13 and 16:27-28.
3. The glorious King and Judge: who will return to establish God's kingdom on earth as seen in Luke 25:31 & 26:64.

<sup>25</sup> Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. <sup>26</sup> Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, We have seen remarkable things today.

#### Luke 5:25-26

Had the miracle not been fulfilled, then charges of blasphemy would have been upheld but since he demonstrated his power, the charge should have been withdrawn. Many of the religious leaders, and indeed the population, who witnessed these miracles day after day, failed to

comprehend what they were seeing, and who it was that graced their presence. Sadly, they condemned themselves to eternal suffering and it could easily have been so very different for them.

#### IV.b.ii [Luke 5:27-32 - The calling of Levi](#)

Jesus now brings forgiveness to a tax collector who, by the nature of his profession, would have been despised by the majority of the population.

<sup>27</sup> After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. Follow me, Jesus said to him, <sup>28</sup> and Levi got up, left everything and followed him.

#### [Luke 5:27-28](#)

A [tax collector](#) in Palestine was a representative of the Roman governing authorities. Their tendency to resort to extortion made them despised and hated by their own people.

[Levi](#). In Matthew 9:9 he is called Matthew. The Jews probably considered him a traitor since collecting taxes entailed cooperation with the Roman occupiers of Palestine.

[Tax booth](#). These were often either portable tents or simply a table and benches. They could often be set up on main roads or by the sea, wherever traders would likely to be passing.

[Follow me](#) is an invitation to a total commitment to Christ. Levi responded as he [left everything](#), which was Jesus' advice to the rich ruler in Luke 18:18-30.

[Followed him](#) indicates the start of a life-long commitment on earth and into the realms of eternity beyond that. It means total submission to God's will and instruction, and is commonly called discipleship.

This encounter with Jesus is just one where someone just gives up everything to follow Jesus with no logical reason to do so. There was something about Jesus but yet it had been said of him: <<He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him>> (Isaiah 53:2).

<sup>29</sup> Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them.

#### [Luke 5:29](#)

[Eating with them](#) or reclining at table. In formal dining, guests reclined on a couch that stretched around three sides of a room. The host took the centre seat at a U-shaped series of low tables, surrounded by the most honoured guests on either side with the guests' heads reclining toward the tables and their feet toward the wall.

<sup>30</sup> But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and 'sinners'?

## Luke 5:30

Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and 'sinners'? Such table fellowship implies welcoming these people into extended interpersonal association, which the Pharisees thought would make a person unclean. But, rather than being defiled by association with the sinners, just as Jesus would cleanse the leper rather than being made unclean by the leper as commented on in v.13, so Jesus will bring sinners to repentance and forgiveness in v.32.

<sup>31</sup> Jesus answered them, It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.

<sup>32</sup> I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

## Luke 5:31-32

Those who are healthy; those who are sick. Jesus likens those who are well, to those who are righteous; and those who are sick, to sinners. Jesus' opponents must judge for themselves which ones they are. On account of their lack of mercy, they are in fact sick and sinners.

I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners. Jesus' offer of salvation to sinners threatens the Pharisees' way of life, yet it is at the heart of the Gospel he came announcing: <<I desire mercy, and not sacrifice>>, which is a quotation from Hosea 6:6. Sacrifice summarised observance of religious rituals. More important to God was mercy. The Septuagint rendering of the Hebrew word hesed, which means steadfast love, would have led the Pharisees to care for these sinners as Jesus did.

## IV.b.iii Luke 5:33-39 - Jesus questioned about fasting

This account contrasts the new situation of the Kingdom of God with the previous old situation under the Mosaic Law.

<sup>33</sup> They said to him, John's disciples often fast and pray, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours go on eating and drinking. <sup>34</sup> Jesus answered, Can you make the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them?

## Luke 5:33-34

Can you make the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? Jesus refers to himself as the bridegroom who, in the OT, was the Lord, as confirmed in Isaiah 62:5 <<As a young man marries a maiden, so will your sons marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you>>, and Hosea 2:19-20 <<I will betroth you to me for ever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the LORD>>. While Jesus is present with his disciples they are to rejoice; when he is taken away from them, then they will fast. They will then return to the practice of fasting to seek the presence of God but they need not do that when Jesus, as the Son of God, is present with them. Taken away is an indirect prediction of Jesus' death: <<By oppression and judgment he was taken away. Yet who of his generation protested? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was punished>> (Isaiah 53:8).

Various kinds of fasts were commonly practiced in OT times although the law required only one fast a year and that on the Day of Atonement. Although fasting is probably implied by the commands <<deny yourselves>> in Leviticus 16:29-34 and 23:26-32. In addition to abstaining from food, people were to humble themselves by praying, mourning and wearing sackcloth. As with giving (see Matthew 6:2-4), and praying (vv.5-15), fasting is to be a matter of the heart between the Christian and God.

<sup>35</sup> But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; in those days they will fast.

#### Luke 5:35

Time will come. Jesus is fully aware of his coming death.

When the bridegroom will be taken from them. Although a riddle for Jesus' audience, Luke's readers would have understood this as referring to Jesus' death.

In those days, that is, in the time between Jesus' death and resurrection, and also after he has returned to heaven, fasting will be appropriate for his followers.

<sup>36</sup> He told them this parable: No-one tears a patch from a new garment and sews it on an old one. If he does, he will have torn the new garment, and the patch from the new will not match the old. <sup>37</sup> And no-one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. <sup>38</sup> No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins. <sup>39</sup> And no-one after drinking old wine wants the new, for he says, 'The old is better'.

#### Luke 5:36-39

Jesus concludes his response to the question about fasting (v.33) with a parable consisting of two main metaphors:

1. A new patch cannot be put on an old garment, for upon washing, it will shrink and, pulling on the already shrunken old garment, it will tear it.
2. One does not put new wine into old wineskins. New fermenting wine would stretch the old, inelastic wineskins and cause them to burst. New wine needs newer, more elastic wine skins.

These metaphors can be applied to the attitude of those who accept the ideas of the Gospel and the New Covenant with Jesus and those who resolutely hold to OT ideas and, in particular, their traditions.

No-one is best understood as an ironic condemnation of the Pharisees, who favoured the past and rejected the arrival of the kingdom and, with it, the new covenant that Luke 22:20 introduces with: <<In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you>>. The point of these two metaphors is that one cannot mix the old and the new covenant; and that the new covenant era, inaugurated by Jesus' coming, will require repentance, for in Matthew 4:17b he said: <<Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near>>, and regeneration as confirmed in John 3:3 by: <<In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again" >>, and new forms of worship, as confirmed by Jesus in John 4:24 <<God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth>>.

In part, this parable explains that Jesus knew he couldn't just take his disciples out of the world with all the pressures it would bring, i.e. tasting the new wine, without the risk that they may buckle to the pressure and want to return to how things were, i.e. their passion for old wine. In order for the new wine not to damage its container it must be kept in new wine skins and part of our coming to salvation is the process of being placed into new wine skins that won't burst, i.e. taking on the form of Christ through being born again.

God did a similar thing with the Israelites when bringing them out of Egypt. He would not lead them through the land of the Philistines in case the threat of battle persuaded the Israelites to return to Egypt (Exodus 13:17).