

# The Gospel of Luke

## Lesson 8

### Preaching in the Synagogues

Although chapter four ends with Jesus departing the Galilean area for ministry opportunities in Judea, Luke continues His ministry in Galilee in chapter five at the Lake of Gennesaret where He steps into a small boat and teaches the people gathered on the seaside.

### By the Lake of Gennesaret Luke 5:1-3

**Luke 5:1** 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; <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> 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.

We do not know how much time has passed between the Capernaum-to-Judea-preaching trip and this event. However, it is important to remember that the reputation of Jesus has spread so quickly that the multitudes of people are clamoring to be near Him and He has very little time for Himself. One morning at the Lake of Gennesaret, Jesus is pressed by the multitudes to the edge of the water. Simon Peter's boat is there along with another boat. Jesus climbs into Simon's boat and they move just a short distance from the shore and He speaks to the multitude.

The Lake of Gennesaret is the northwest portion of the Sea of Galilee. Why does Luke not call it the Sea of Galilee? Luke calls it Gennesaret because it gives their location on the Sea. Gennesaret was a town on the northeast seashore although no sign of the town remains today. The people of Gennesaret referred to their portion of the Sea of Galilee as the Lake of Gennesaret. The people at this event are from Gennesaret and it is where Simon Peter keeps his boat.



Figure 1: Lake of Gennesaret



Map 8: Town of Gennesaret

## Catching Men

Luke 5:4-11

**Luke 5:4** When He had finished speaking, He said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." <sup>5</sup> 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." <sup>6</sup> When they had done this, they enclosed a great quantity of fish, and their nets *began* to break; <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> But when Simon Peter saw *that*, he fell down at Jesus' feet, saying, "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!" <sup>9</sup> For amazement had seized him and all his companions because of the catch of fish which they had taken; <sup>10</sup> 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." <sup>11</sup> When they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed Him.

It is time for Jesus to impress three men who will soon become part of His inner circle of followers. Jesus uses the catch of fish to entice the men who are already in the boat with Him to leave their fishing business and follow Him. Jesus has worked a miracle in their lives. They need the catch to provide for their families and they are amazed by the miracle Jesus has in store for them! The fishermen have already been out in the boat all night and they are tired. Jesus instructs Simon, James and John to go out again and cast their nets one more time. Their catch is enormous and they have been caught by the Master too!

Once again, we do not know how many days have passed since Jesus worked the miracle of the fish for Simon Peter, James and John. In this next event, Jesus encounters a man completely covered with leprosy.

## The Leper Healed

Luke 5:12-14

**Luke 5:12** 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." <sup>13</sup> And He stretched out His hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing; be cleansed." And immediately the leprosy left him. <sup>14</sup> 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."

Easton's 1897 Bible Dictionary states:

This disease begins with specks on the eyelids and on the palms, gradually spreading over the body, bleaching the hair white wherever they appear, crusting the affected parts with white scales, and causing terrible sores and swellings. From the skin the disease eats inward to the bones, rotting the whole body piecemeal. In Christ's day no leper could live in a walled town, though he might in an open village. But wherever he was he was required to have his outer garment rent as a sign of deep grief, to be bareheaded, and to cover his beard with his mantle, as if in lamentation

at his own virtual death. He had further to warn passers-by to keep away from him, by calling out, 'Unclean! Unclean!' Nor could he speak to anyone, or receive or return a salutation, since in the East this involves an embrace.

After He heals the man, Jesus instructs him to tell no one and to present the proper offering for the healing of the leprosy. Jesus has told the leper to perform quite a task! Leviticus 14 provides the regulation for the offering of a healed leper.

Leviticus 14:2 "This shall be the law of the leper in the day of his cleansing. Now he shall be brought to the priest, <sup>3</sup> and the priest shall go out to the outside of the camp. Thus the priest shall look, and if the infection of leprosy has been healed in the leper, <sup>4</sup> then the priest shall give orders to take two live clean birds and cedar wood and a scarlet string and hyssop for the one who is to be cleansed. <sup>5</sup> "The priest shall also give orders to slay the one bird in an earthenware vessel over running water. <sup>6</sup> "As for the live bird, he shall take it together with the cedar wood and the scarlet string and the hyssop, and shall dip them and the live bird in the blood of the bird that was slain over the running water. <sup>7</sup> "He shall then sprinkle seven times the one who is to be cleansed from the leprosy and shall pronounce him clean, and shall let the live bird go free over the open field. <sup>8</sup> "The one to be cleansed shall then wash his clothes and shave off all his hair and bathe in water and be clean. Now afterward, he may enter the camp, but he shall stay outside his tent for seven days. <sup>9</sup> "It will be on the seventh day that he shall shave off all his hair: he shall shave his head and his beard and his eyebrows, even all his hair. He shall then wash his clothes and bathe his body in water and be clean. <sup>10</sup> "Now on the eighth day he is to take two male lambs without defect, and a yearling ewe lamb without defect, and three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering, and one log of oil; <sup>11</sup> and the priest who pronounces him clean shall present the man to be cleansed and the aforesaid before the LORD at the doorway of the tent of meeting. <sup>12</sup> "Then the priest shall take the one male lamb and bring it for a guilt offering, with the log of oil, and present them as a wave offering before the LORD. <sup>13</sup> "Next he shall slaughter the male lamb in the place where they slaughter the sin offering and the burnt offering, at the place of the sanctuary—for the guilt offering, like the sin offering, belongs to the priest; it is most holy. <sup>14</sup> "The priest shall then take some of the blood of the guilt offering, and the priest shall put it on the lobe of the right ear of the one to be cleansed, and on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot. <sup>15</sup> "The priest shall also take some of the log of oil, and pour it into his left palm; <sup>16</sup> the priest shall then dip his right-hand finger into the oil that is in his left palm, and with his finger sprinkle some of the oil seven times before the LORD. <sup>17</sup> "Of the remaining oil which is in his palm, the priest shall put some on the right ear lobe of the one to be cleansed, and on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot, on the blood of the guilt offering; <sup>18</sup> while the rest of the oil that is in the priest's palm, he shall put on the head of the one to be cleansed. So the priest shall make atonement on his behalf before the LORD. <sup>19</sup> "The priest shall next offer the sin offering and make atonement for the one to be cleansed from his uncleanness. Then afterward, he shall slaughter the burnt offering. <sup>20</sup> "The priest shall offer up the burnt offering and the grain offering on the altar. Thus the priest shall make atonement for him, and he will be clean. <sup>21</sup> "But if he is poor and his means are insufficient, then he is to take one male lamb for a guilt offering as a wave offering to make atonement for him, and

one-tenth of an *ephah* of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering, and a log of oil, <sup>22</sup> and two turtledoves or two young pigeons which are within his means, the one shall be a sin offering and the other a burnt offering. <sup>23</sup> "Then the eighth day he shall bring them for his cleansing to the priest, at the doorway of the tent of meeting, before the LORD. <sup>24</sup> "The priest shall take the lamb of the guilt offering and the log of oil, and the priest shall offer them for a wave offering before the LORD. <sup>25</sup> "Next he shall slaughter the lamb of the guilt offering; and the priest is to take some of the blood of the guilt offering and put *it* on the lobe of the right ear of the one to be cleansed and on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot. <sup>26</sup> "The priest shall also pour some of the oil into his left palm; <sup>27</sup> and with his right-hand finger the priest shall sprinkle some of the oil that is in his left palm seven times before the LORD. <sup>28</sup> "The priest shall then put some of the oil that is in his palm on the lobe of the right ear of the one to be cleansed, and on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot, on the place of the blood of the guilt offering. <sup>29</sup> "Moreover, the rest of the oil that is in the priest's palm he shall put on the head of the one to be cleansed, to make atonement on his behalf before the LORD. <sup>30</sup> "He shall then offer one of the turtledoves or young pigeons, which are within his means. <sup>31</sup> "*He shall offer* what he can afford, the one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering, together with the grain offering. So the priest shall make atonement before the LORD on behalf of the one to be cleansed. <sup>32</sup> "This is the law *for him* in whom there is an infection of leprosy, whose means are limited for his cleansing."

### **Slip Away to the Wilderness and Pray**

Luke 5:15-16

**Luke 5:15** But the news about Him was spreading even farther, and large crowds were gathering to hear *Him* and to be healed of their sicknesses. <sup>16</sup> But Jesus Himself would *often* slip away to the wilderness and pray.

However, the leper cannot keep his healing quiet. The LORD's reputation and fame spread like a wildfire across the countryside. But prayer is important to Jesus and He always takes time to pray. Luke reports that Jesus often slips away from the multitude to spend time with the Father in prayer!

### **The Counsel of Men from Every Village Question Jesus**

Luke 5:17

**Luke 5:17** 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.

Verse 17 speaks of the counsel that has gathered to listen to Jesus. It is not the Sabbath, just a regular day of the week. These men come from Galilee, Judea and the city of Jerusalem. This statement indicates that this event evidently occurs during the middle of the week because most of these men live more than a Sabbath day's journey away. Jesus teaches and ministers every day of the week as part of His daily life. Notice that the Pharisees and teachers are there to listen to His teaching. The Pharisees are a party of

religious men that grew out of the Assideans, meaning "pious", that originated in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes in a revolt against his heathenizing policy. The first mention of them is in a description by Josephus of the three sects or schools into which the Jews were divided in 145 BC. The other two sects included the Essenes and the Sadducees. In the time of the Lord, they are the most popular party and are extremely accurate in all matters pertaining to the law of Moses. Paul, when brought before the council of Jerusalem, professes to be Pharisee in Acts 23:6-8 and Acts 26:4-5. Much of the creed that the Pharisees lived by was based on sound theology, yet their system of religion was godless. They are first mentioned in the New Testament in Matthew 3:7 where they are ranked with the Sadducees as a "generation of vipers." They are self-righteous and overly proud.

From the very beginning of His ministry, the Pharisees have shown themselves bitter and persistent enemies of the Lord. They cannot bear His doctrines and seek by every means available to destroy His influence among the people. However, on this occasion they were there to listen.

An interesting clause ends the verse with "the power of the Lord was *present* for Him to perform healing." What Luke means is that Jesus has the power of the Lord God to heal. He does not mean that this power is intermittent.

## **The Paralyzed Man Through the Roof**

Luke 4:18-26

**Luke 4:18** "THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED, <sup>19</sup> TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD." <sup>20</sup> And He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. <sup>21</sup> And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." <sup>22</sup> And all were speaking well of Him, and wondering at the gracious words which were falling from His lips; and they were saying, "Is this not Joseph's son?" <sup>23</sup> And He said to them, "No doubt you will quote this proverb to Me, 'Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we heard was done at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.'" <sup>24</sup> And He said, "Truly I say to you, no prophet is welcome in his hometown. <sup>25</sup> "But I say to you in truth, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the sky was shut up for three years and six months, when a great famine came over all the land; <sup>26</sup> and yet Elijah was sent to none of them, but only to Zarephath, *in the land* of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow.

In verse 18, we discover that this meeting between the counsel and Jesus occurs in a home and not on the lake, a hillside or in a synagogue. The city of Capernaum is in the Galilee area and the house is so crowded that the men cannot get their friend near Jesus. Nevertheless, the men are able to climb to the roof where they are able to lower the paralyzed man to the middle of the room, right in front of Jesus.

We should not rush to the healing of the man because we do not want to miss an important point. Verse 20 begins with the phrase "and seeing their faith." Jesus forgives the man

because of the "faith" of those bringing the paralyzed man to Him. It is not the faith of the paralyzed man that precipitates the forgiveness but that of his friends. This concept is not uncommon in the Scripture; it is just uncommon in the theology of many of the teachers of today. Faith healers often proclaim the sick healed, yet when cancer kills the body, the faith healers quickly proclaim that the sick one's faith was not strong enough. James does not agree with that theology!

**James 5:14** Is anyone among you sick? *Then* he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; <sup>15</sup> and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.

When Jesus forgives the sins of the paralyzed man, the Pharisees show their disdain toward Him! Jesus has blasphemed because no one can forgive sin except God. The man is let down on the stretcher and Jesus has forgiven his sins! Notice that Jesus has not physically healed him; therefore, a great distinction is made between forgiveness of sin and healing! Let us not forget that forgiveness of sin has eternal consequences but healing has only temporal consequences. Jesus has given the man what he needs, not what he wants! Nevertheless, the Pharisees are appalled that Jesus is acting as if He is God. Therefore, Jesus presents a two-part question to the counsel. Which is easier, forgiveness of sin or healing? Anyone can speak the words "you are forgiven" but that does not guarantee forgiveness. It is in the theology of the Pharisees that no one can forgive sin except God. However, healing is a different story! To heal someone means that a result is required which is viewable to all! It is easier to forgive than to heal, unless you are God. Jesus heals the man and the counsel is astonished. They are filled with fear and rightly so, they worship God and rightly so, and the healing is astonishing, but the Pharisees are still appalled!

## **The Calling of Levi**

Luke 5:27-28

**Luke 5:27** After that He went out and noticed a tax collector named Levi sitting in the tax booth, and He said to him, "Follow Me." <sup>28</sup> And he left everything behind, and got up and *began* to follow Him.

It is here that we ask the question, where was this paralyzed man healed? Mark 2:1-3 reveals the answer.

**Mark 2:1** When He had come back to Capernaum several days afterward, it was heard that He was at home. <sup>2</sup> And many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room, not even near the door; and He was speaking the word to them. <sup>3</sup> And they \*came, bringing to Him a paralytic, carried by four men.

The event occurred in Capernaum. From the passage in Mark, we can determine that Capernaum is becoming the home base for Jesus, most likely in Peter's home.

The passage also indicates that Levi is a tax-collector, responsible to Caesar for the tax revenue collected in the area of Galilee. In the parallel account in the Gospel of Matthew the man's name is given as "Matthew" instead of "Levi."

**Matthew 9:9** As Jesus went on from there, He saw a man called Matthew, sitting in the tax collector's booth; and He \*said to him, "Follow Me!" And he got up and followed Him.

What compels Levi to follow Jesus is not clear unless Levi has just seen the paralyzed man healed and that should be compelling enough for anyone! It is this Levi who pens the Gospel to the Jews titled in most Bibles "The Gospel According to Matthew."

### **The Reception for Jesus at the Home of Levi**

Luke 5:29-32

**Luke 5:29** 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. <sup>30</sup> The Pharisees and their scribes *began* grumbling at His disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with the tax collectors and sinners?" <sup>31</sup> And Jesus answered and said to them, "*It is* not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick.

As in the Scripture, the home is full of tax-gatherers and other people who are not particularly popular people in the neighborhoods. Being a tax collector was the most unpopular job in the nation, especially in those days. The tax collector was also called the Publican and the job was a political appointment created by the Romans to help collect taxes in the provinces. Actually, the title "tax collector" is more correct than the older term "publican" in referring to the lowest rank in the collection organization. Zacchaeus was called a "chief among the publicans" in Luke 19:2, and this probably indicated that he contracted with the government to collect taxes, and in turn, hired others to do the actual work. In New Testament times, people bid for the job of chief tax collector and then exacted a tax plus a profit from the citizens. Romans filled most of the offices although some natives were able to acquire the bids. Publicans were held in the lowest esteem because of their excessive profits, being placed in the same category as harlots according to Matthew 21:32. Here, Jesus is accused of eating with and befriending them as also found in Matthew 9:11.

**Matthew 9:11** When the Pharisees saw *this*, they said to His disciples, "Why is your Teacher eating with the tax collectors and sinners?"

Did you notice that the Pharisees did not complain to Jesus, but to His disciples? Nothing has changed in the make up of men! Then, just as today, regardless of the language or nationality, people rarely complain to the person with whom they are upset. Jesus hears their grumbling and speaks to them. He understands that they consider themselves the righteous, pious, special men of God and the tax collectors are not. Romans 3:2 says:

**Romans 3:1** Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? <sup>2</sup> Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God. <sup>3</sup> What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it? <sup>4</sup> May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man *be found* a liar, as it is written, "THAT YOU MAY BE JUSTIFIED IN YOUR WORDS, AND PREVAIL WHEN YOU ARE JUDGED."

Jesus knows that the religious people of Israel have the oracles of God. Nothing has changed in the oracles. However, it does not mean that they live by the oracles, nor do they understand the oracles. Jesus knows that His purpose is to take the message of those oracles to all the people because the Jews will not share them with the world. The Jews have the redemption law in their hands; Jesus has come to earth to offer it to all the people, even the unlearned who are in need of the physician, not just the learned!

### **No Fasting When You Have the Bridegroom**

Luke 5:33-35

**Luke 5:33** 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." <sup>34</sup> And Jesus said to them, "You cannot make the attendants of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them, can you? <sup>35</sup> "But *the* days will come; and when the bridegroom is taken away from them, then they will fast in those days."

It is very interesting that the Pharisees mention John. They disdain John because he has numbered them with the harlots and called them vipers. Yet they mention that John's disciples fast when they pray, a fact not confirmed anywhere else in the Scripture. In addition, they state that their disciples also fast. The Pharisees are disturbed because the tax collectors in Levi's home do not fast, but eat and drink. In the Scripture, "fasting" is simply what you do when you are not eating and in all the Scripture, it is always associated with mourning over a death or sin. Jesus gives us the best key to this answer when He replies with a reasonable question concerning fasting. His point is that while His disciples are in His presence, why do they need to fast? Here, Jesus gives us the first prophecy of His impending death when He tells the Pharisees that one day He will be taken away from them and they will mourn their loss. But Jesus would not be gone for long! On the third day, He would rise from the grave, they would have Him again and He would live in their hearts. A reasonable question that we should ask in light of these words of Jesus is "if you have the bridegroom living in you today, do you need to fast?" The complete absence of any direct command to keep fasts in the church from the book of Acts through the Revelation should provide ample proof that after the resurrection of the Lord and the acceptance of Him as Savior, fasting should not be part of a Christian's life. All the other religions of world may fast for some sign from God, including the Jews, but Christianity is not a religion, it is a faith in Christ, the only Savior.

## New Versus Old

Luke 5:36-39

**Luke 5:36** 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. <sup>37</sup> "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. <sup>38</sup> "But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins. <sup>39</sup> "And no one, after drinking old *wine* wishes for new; for he says, "The old is good *enough*."

Wineskins of that day were goatskins sewn together at the edges to form a watertight bag. Because new wine expands as it ages, it had to be stored in new, pliable wineskins. A used skin, having become more rigid, would burst and spill when filled with new wine. Like old wineskins, the Pharisees are too rigid to accept Jesus. They cannot accept the teachings of Jesus within their old traditions or rules. Christianity required new approaches, new traditions and new structures. Our church programs and ministries should not be so structured that they have no room for a fresh touch of the Spirit, a new method or a new idea. We, too, must be careful that our hearts do not become so rigid that they prevent us from accepting the new way of thinking that Christ brings. We need to keep our hearts pliable so we can accept Jesus' life-changing message. Some people are too busy serving the Lord that they do not have time to serve the Lord! Stuck in their ways, they have filled their days with religious rituals that are wood, hay and stubble and therefore miss out on the gold, silver and precious opportunities of the Lord today!