

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;

5:2 and He saw two boats lying at the edge of the lake; but the fishermen had gotten out of them and were washing their nets.

5:3 And He got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little way from the land. And He sat down and began teaching the people from the boat.

Gennesaret was another name for Lake Galilee, a freshwater lake in Northern Israel and a source of income and food for the people who lived around it .

The story found in Luke 5:1-11 could have very well taken place the day before the call of the disciples in Matthew 4. In any case, the crowds were eager to hear the word of God and were pressing in upon Jesus. In order for everyone to hear and see, Jesus decided to get into Peter's boat (whose mother-in-law He had just healed – Lk. 4). Then, a little way from land, He sat down and began to teach the crowds. The water allowed the sound to travel and acted like a natural amphitheater.

But in this passage Luke doesn't focus on what Jesus said – His message isn't recorded – but on what Jesus did.

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."

5:5 Simon answered and said, "Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but I will do as You say and let down the nets."

5:6 When they had done this, they enclosed a great quantity of fish, and their nets began to break;

5:7 so they signaled to their partners in the other boat for them to come and help them. And they came and filled both of the boats, so that they began to sink.

5:8 But when Simon Peter saw that, he fell down at Jesus' feet, saying, "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"

5:9 For amazement had seized him and all his companions because of the catch of fish which they had taken;

5:10 and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men."

5:11 When they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed Him.

Fishing was a fairly large industry where fishermen caught fish and dried them, or made a fish sauce that was sold over the entire Mediterranean world.

Nighttime was the best time to fish on the lake, and Peter had just spent the night doing so but had nothing to show for it. They had just finished cleaning and folding their nets, so Jesus' request must have sounded absurd to him. If a professional fisherman had just spent the best hours of fishing without success, what would be the chance of catching anything now? But Peter had also learned in the time he had spent with Jesus that His word should not be ignored, so he let down his net.

To his surprise, when the nets were lowered they were filled with so many fish they were in danger of tearing. Even when they signaled their partners in another boat, there was not ample room. Though the number or weight of the fish was not mentioned, the catch was clearly abnormal and not in line with proven fishing techniques. The extraordinary nature of the catch showed that Jesus was an extraordinary person. Luke 5:9 says that "amazement had seized him and all his companions because of the catch of fish which they had taken." Some may think that this was a coincidence, but even these fishermen, who spent their lives fishing, were astonished by what had just happened. They had seen nothing like this ever before. They who knew the lake and its resources far better than anyone, knew without a doubt that it was not their skill, or their knowledge in where to throw the nets, or anything else that they did; it was the power of Christ displayed.

Instead of rejoicing over the catch, Peter fell down before Jesus. His words, "Depart from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" are typical of those who find themselves in the presence of the Holy One (Gen. 18:27; Job 42:6; Isa. 6:5; Exo. 20:19). The Holy One, however, does not depart, but calls the sinner into a discipleship relationship with Him.

This was the turning point that caused the disciples to leave everything and follow Him. Their new activities would now include drawing men into a living relationship with Christ; they would become fishers of men.

Of course, fishing was not what we conceive of fishing to be. It was not sitting in the shade holding a pole with a bobber floating on the water's surface, and a lot of waiting. Fishing was a group effort where the fishermen had a circular net that was cast out into the water and then drawn into the boat. Next, any fish caught were removed, and the net was cast again. It was very active and strenuous work. It took persistence and dedication, which is the pattern we see the disciples exhibit in sharing the Good News in the Book of Acts.

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."

5:13 And He stretched out His hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing; be cleansed." And immediately the leprosy left him.

5:14 And He ordered him to tell no one, "But go and show yourself to the priest and make an offering for your cleansing, just as Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."

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.

In the NT, "leprosy" covered a wide range of skin diseases and was abhorred by the Jews (See Broadus, 175 for a detailed description of the appearance of the disease). It was particularly hated because it rendered both the diseased individual and all that he came in contact with ceremonially unclean. "To be a leper was interpreted as being cursed by God (Num. 12:10, 12; Job 18:13). Healings were rare and were considered as difficult as raising the dead (II Ki. 5:7, 14)" (Carson, 198). Thus, people with skin

diseases suffered immensely; not only did they suffer from the disease itself but they were also socially isolated from loved ones and friends and co-workers. Moreover, they suffered the stigma of being in God's displeasure.

The leper approached Jesus with great humility and knelt before Him. The man had faith that Jesus could heal, but was fearful that Jesus might pass him by. His request was that he might be made clean.

Though "cleanness" had a basic meaning of purity, it also had a broader meaning of "normal." If a person with a disease became well, he was declared "clean" (Lev. 13:13, 17, 39) because he had returned to normal. Someone became unclean when they deviated from normality. For example, when a woman had her menstrual cycle she was temporarily not in her "normal" condition so she would be temporarily unclean. Theologically, it is impossible for the unclean to make contact with anything that is holy. They are complete opposites in theory and in practice and must be kept absolutely distinct from each other lest God's judgement fall. Certain illnesses, like leprosy, required isolation from others, not primarily to prevent the disease from spreading, but because an unclean person could not live in the midst of a holy people. Therefore, the leper's desire to be made clean was much more than simply a desire to return to physical health. It involved the removal of spiritual defilement as well.

"If you are willing" (not, "if you can") expresses both humility and submission to the will of God, and reflects the proper attitude of all who approach the Creator. Jesus' response proved that His will is decisive. "He already had authority and power and only needed to decide to act" (Carson, 198). Every other miracle worker in the Bible ascribes authority to another. Jesus alone uses such expressions as, "I will make you clean."

"By touching an unclean leper, Jesus would become ceremonially defiled Himself (cf. Lev. 13-14). But at Jesus' touch, nothing remains defiled. Far from becoming unclean, Jesus makes the unclean clean" (Carson, 198).