



Session Six

The Gospel of Luke, Pt.3

Luke 5 & 6

Chapters 5 and 6 of Luke are particularly important. To this point, Jesus has acted alone; now, he begins calling others to leave everything and follow him in doing the work of the Kingdom. These chapters are framed by the calling of Simon (Peter) (5:1-11) and the appointing of the 12 as Apostles (6:12-16). Between those two events are several healings and confrontations with religious leaders, and chapter 6 ends with Luke's version of the Sermon on the Mount. Consequently, these two chapters begin to make clear the demands, content, and consequences of following Jesus. And to the extent they begin sketching the contours of the Kingdom, they start to articulate a God-defined "normal."

Questions to consider as you read Luke Chapters 5 & 6

- 1) What message might you take away from the fact that Jesus first taught the people (5:3), then instructed Peter to "let down the nets for a catch" (5:4)?

- 2) Luke's narrative of the calling of Simon (Peter) is different from that of Matthew (4:18-22) and Mark (1:16-20). Luke, in telling of the great catch of fish that breaks the nets, uses a story that John (21:1-14) tells as a post-resurrection appearance. In any event, the details of the catch are probably less important than several other issues in play here. As you read 5:1-11, consider the following:
 - a) Why were Simon, James, and John chosen? Their qualifications? character? potential?
 - b) What might the significance be that they were called not at home or in the Temple but as they're working?
 - c) Simon tells Jesus to go away because he, Simon, is a sinner. But Jesus doesn't go away. Why? Don't settle for an easy, obvious answer to this question.
 - d) Note what Jesus tells them they'll be doing (5:10). What does this suggest about the focus of following Jesus?
 - e) What does Simon, James, and John's reaction to Jesus' words (5:11) tell you about following Jesus? Look also at Levi's reaction (5:28).

3) 5:12-26 are healing narratives but they are also very much stories about Jesus' identity as Messiah and what being the Messiah means. Consequently, they are stories about what life in the Kingdom is about.

- a) Jesus' first healing in Luke involves a leper. What does the healing of a leper suggest about the focus of Jesus' ministry? Again, don't settle for an easy, obvious answer.
- b) Jesus physically touches the leper to heal him. Jesus' healings frequently involved no physical contact at all. What is the significance of the touching here?
- c) Note that even as the crowds of people coming to see him grew, we're told that Jesus "often withdrew to lonely places and prayed." Luke again underscores a basic rhythm to Jesus' life: prayer > action > prayer > action.
- d) Notice that when Jesus heals the paralytic, the Pharisees and Scribes ("teachers of the law") have begun following Jesus in order, we can assume, to keep an eye on him. Note, too, what drives the friends of the paralytic to go to the lengths they do to get him to Jesus (5:20). And, finally, note that Jesus doesn't first heal the man as we might expect; first, he forgives his sins. Why might that be?
- e) Jesus' forgiveness of the man's sins hits at the very heart of Jesus' identity. Other than the obvious—that Jesus can heal and forgive sins—what does 5:17-26 suggest about Jesus as Messiah and life in the Kingdom?

4) What does Levi being a tax collector (5:27) and the fact he hosts a banquet for Jesus attended by other tax collectors (5:29) suggest to you about following Jesus? What is the significance of Jesus going to Levi rather than Levi coming to Jesus? What do you suppose the message is for the church of Jesus' words in 5:31?

5) By the end of verse 27, Jesus has called four individuals to discipleship. Note the call: "Follow me." That's all Jesus says, but take a few moments to unpack those two words. Based upon what you've read so far, what does it mean to follow Jesus?

6) Read 5:31-32 then reflect on this: *Discipleship consists not in separation but in association.*

7) The context for 5:33-35 is that in the Judaism of Jesus' day, fasting was a common practice demonstrating piety and respect for God. Pharisees, for example, typically fasted one day twice a week. What do you think Jesus means in his response in verses 34-35?

8) Jesus' parable in 5:36-39 is usually understood as a commentary on the necessity of change. What is he saying about old and new? What is he saying about "normal"? What does this suggest about the act of following Jesus? What does this suggest about the responsibilities of the church?

9) Note how Jesus' words about the need for new wineskins—and a new "normal"—are followed immediately (6:1-10) with two instances of what the new normal looks like. And note how those threatened by a new normal react.

10) Chapter 6 begins with two Sabbath controversy narratives, both of which set God's command to observe the Sabbath over against love of neighbor. Together, as scholar Alan Culpepper points out, they ask the question, Which takes precedence—the duty of Sabbath rest or the duty to feed the hungry and heal the sick? Put another way, they ask, Can the love of God be separated from love of neighbor, or is the love of neighbor an expression of love of God? Are we honoring God if we ignore human need? When the questions are asked in these terms, the answers are pretty obvious. But look at your own life. Are there places where you are or aren't doing things, even with the best, holiest of intentions...things, even, that you feel are honoring God, yet result in you ignoring human need?

11) Note that it is after Jesus' healing of the man with a shriveled hand that the Pharisees and Scribes begin actively plotting against Jesus. Granted Jesus healed the man and, granted, it was on the Sabbath, but why would *this* result in the Jewish leaders plotting against Jesus?

12) In 6:12-16, Jesus chooses 12 of his followers and makes them Apostles. It is not coincidence that this happens at the precise time it does in Luke's narrative. Based upon your reading of what precedes the passage (and what comes immediately after it), why is the timing of Jesus' action so significant?

13) Luke 6:17-49 is referred to as the Sermon on the Plain and is, essentially, Luke's version of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. Since we've already spent much time discussing the Sermon on the Mount, I won't go into similar detail here. But there are several things you may wish to consider as you read these verses.

- a) Notice the differences in the two Sermons; some, such as in Luke's recounting of the beatitudes, are fairly obvious (and note the addition of the "woes" (24-26); others less so.
- b) Throughout the New Testament, but especially in Luke, the call to follow Jesus is a call to live like Jesus, if not always in details like becoming an itinerant teacher then certainly in the priorities and values we set for ourselves and in how we treat others. This is especially clear here given that Jesus' Sermon falls immediately after he has chosen 12 to be his Apostles: *you are called and this is how you are to live.*