

A Fisherman and a Leper

Lesson 4

This faith-building lesson covers two episodes in the 5th chapter of Luke. In each paragraph, we will examine one of two key elements of trust, and why Jesus is worthy of our trust.

I. Building the faith to catch men – Luke 5:1-11

A. Background and setting

1. Using the Lake of Gennesaret as a natural amplifier, the Lord teaches the eager multitude along the shore from a fishing boat.
2. When he finishes the morning lesson, he says to Simon Peter, “Put out into the deep water for a catch.”
3. Peter was reluctant: “Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing...”
4. He decided nevertheless to humor Jesus: “...but at your bidding I will let down the nets.”

B. What ensued is nothing short of extraordinary

1. The text speaks of “a great quantity of fish,” nets that “began to break,” and two boats that “began to sink.”
2. Peter was humbled, and a profound sense of unworthiness overwhelmed him. He fell prostrate and pleaded, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!”
3. This is reminiscent of Isaiah – cf. Isaiah 6:5

C. Jesus’ miracles always had a *kingdom* purpose. In this case, it was to prepare Peter for his life’s work.

1. There are three stages to Peter’s development in the Gospels:
 - a. Following the teaching of Jesus as a disciple – cf. Jn. 1:40-42
 - b. Leaving the fishing business for a higher calling – cf. Mk. 1:16-20; Lk. 8:1-3
 - c. Becoming one of the twelve apostles – cf. Lk. 6:12-16
2. It is to prepare Peter to go to the 2nd stage, and, soon thereafter, to the 3rd, that Jesus performs this miracle. With a family to feed, would this personable and outspoken disciple have the faith to leave his established career?
3. The miracle was, in essence, a clear message: “Don’t ever doubt Me! I can put fish in your nets better than you ever dreamed!”

D. Did the miracle produce the desired effect?

1. Jesus challenged his pupil: “Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men.”
2. The result: “When they had brought their boats to land, they left *everything* and followed him.” (emph. mine, MW)

II. A Leper’s faith – Luke 5:12-13

A. The author of this Gospel, ever mindful of medical diagnosis (cf. Col. 4:14), describes a man who was “full of leprosy.”

1. No doubt hearing of Jesus' fame, he had searched Jesus out – cf. 5:15
2. When he saw Him, he said, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.”

B. Biblical faith involves three subcomponents:

1. **Conviction** of mind
2. **Trust** of heart
3. **Surrender** of will

C. The heart of faith is the second component, trust. In order for trust to be well-placed, there must be some rational basis. Is the Lord trustworthy?

1. In the case of Jesus and His promises, this revolves around two issues:
 - a. Is He **able** to help us?
 - b. Is He **willing** to help us?
2. Many people, including Peter (in the preceding paragraph), struggle with the Lord's **ability** – cf. Rom. 4:21; Mk. 9:22-23. The leper did not have any doubts about it: “You *can* make me clean.”
3. His problem rested on the Savior's **willingness**: “If you are willing...”
4. Many people have the same problem. Perhaps they lack the confidence that, because of long indulgence in sin, Jesus would actually be **willing** to grant full and complete pardon to them.
5. Such a person might say to himself, “I know He could forgive someone and take him to heaven, but given my own unworthiness, I'm not sure He *would* ever do it for *me*.”
6. We must remind ourselves that lepers in first-century Jewish society were reminded that they were outcasts every day. They were “unclean,” and everyone saw them that way.

D. This little episode is not simply a matter of historical biography. It is written for us!

1. What did Jesus do for this leper? He did the unthinkable: “He stretched out His hand and touched him, saying, ‘I am willing; be cleansed.’ And immediately the leprosy left him.”
2. And what is Jesus willing to do today for each person, plagued not with the disease of the skin but with the heart disease of the soul?
3. Imagine for just a moment the warmth of the Savior's hand reaching out to YOU, as He gently says, “I am willing. Be cleansed.”
4. If we are able to take this lesson to heart, our faith can skyrocket!

Extra Notes for Teachers:

- If you are inclined, you might impress the connection between leprosy (or other skin conditions) and sin in the Bible – cf. Isaiah 1:6; Lev. 14; etc.
- Building on the idea that trusting faith ultimately surrenders to specific conditions, one might allude to the story of Naaman the leper (2 Kings 5:1-14).