

CHAPTER 5

In this chapter, we have,

- I.** Christ preaching to the people out of Peter's ship, for want of a better pulpit (v. 1-3).
- II.** The recompence he made to Peter for the loan of his boat, in a miraculous draught of fishes, by which he intimated to him and his partners his design to make them, as apostles, fishers of men (v. 4-11).
- III.** His cleansing the leper (v. 12-15).
- IV.** A short account of his private devotion and public ministry (v. 16, 17). V. His cure of the man sick of the palsy (v. 18-26).
- VI.** His calling Levi the publican, and conversing with publicans on that occasion (v. 27-32).
- VII.** His justifying his disciples in not fasting so frequently as the disciples of John and the Pharisees did (v. 33-39).

LUKE 5:1-11

THE CALL OF PETER, JAMES, AND JOHN

This passage of story fell, in order of time, before the two miracles we had in the close of the foregoing chapter, and is the same with that which was more briefly related by Matthew and Mark, of Christ's calling Peter and Andrew to be *fishers of men*, ^{<4018>}Matthew 4:18, and ^{<4016>}Mark 1:16. They had not related this miraculous draught of fishes at that time, having only in view the calling of his disciples; but Luke gives us that story as one of the many signs which Jesus did in the presence of his disciples, which *had not been written* in the foregoing books, ^{<4027>}John 20:30, 31. Observe here,

I. What vast *crowds* attended Christ's preaching: *The people pressed upon him to hear the word of God* (v. 1), insomuch that no house would contain them, but he was forced to draw them out to the *strand*, that they might be reminded of the promise made to Abraham, that his seed should be *as the sand upon the sea shore* (^{<4027>}Genesis 22:17), and yet of them but a

remnant shall be saved, ^{<107>}Romans 9:27. The people *flocked about him* (so the word signifies); they showed respect to his preaching, though not without some rudeness to his person, which was very excusable, for they *pressed upon him*. Some would reckon this a discredit to him, to be thus cried up by the vulgar, when none of the *rulers* or of *the Pharisees* *believed in him*; but he reckoned it an honour to him, for their souls were as precious as the souls of the *grandees*, and it is his aim to bring not so much the mighty as the *many sons* to God. It was foretold concerning him that *to him shall the gathering of the people be*. Christ was a popular preacher; and though he was able, at *twelve*, to *dispute* with the *doctors*, yet he chose, at *thirty*, to preach to the capacity of the *vulgar*. See how the people relished *good preaching*, though under all external disadvantages: they pressed to *hear the word of God*; they could perceive it to be the *word of God*, by the divine power and evidence that went along with it, and therefore they coveted to hear it.

II. What poor *conveniencies* Christ had for preaching: *He stood by the lake of Gennesareth* (v. 1), upon a level with the crowd, so that they could neither see him nor hear him; he was lost among them, and, every one striving to get near him, he was crowded, and in danger of being crowded into the water: what must he do? It does not appear that his hearers had any contrivance to give him advantage, but *there were two ships*, or *fishing boats*, brought ashore, one belonging to Simon and Andrew, the other to Zebedee and *his sons*, v. 2. At first, Christ saw Peter and Andrew fishing at some distance (so Matthew tells us, ^{<108>}Matthew 4:18); but he waited till they came to land, and till the *fishermen*, that is, the servants, were *gone out of them* having washed their nets, and thrown them by for that time: so Christ *entered* into that *ship* that belonged to Simon, and begged of him that he would lend it him for a pulpit; and, though he might have commanded him, yet, for love's sake, he rather *prayed him* that he would *thrust out a little from the land*, which would be the worse for his being *heard*, but Christ would have it so, that he might the better be *seen*; and it is his being *lifted up* that *draws men to him*. Wisdom cries *in the top of high places*, ^{<109>}Proverbs 8:2. It intimates that Christ had a strong voice (strong indeed, for he made the *dead* to hear it), and that he did not desire to favour himself. There he *sat down*, and *taught the people* the good knowledge of the Lord.

III. What a particular acquaintance Christ, hereupon, fell into with these fishermen. They had had some conversation with him before, which began at John's baptism (~~400~~ John 1:40, 41); they were with him at *Cana of Galilee* (~~400~~ John 2:2), and in Judea (~~400~~ John 4:3); but as yet they were not called to attend him constantly, and therefore here we have them at their calling, and now it was that they were called into a more intimate fellowship with Christ.

1. When Christ had done preaching, he ordered Peter to apply himself to the business of his calling again: *Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets*, v. 4. It was not the sabbath day, and therefore, as soon as the lecture was over, he set them to work. Time spent on week-days in the public exercises of religion may be but little hindrance to us *in time*, and a great furtherance to us in *temper of mind*, in our worldly business. With what cheerfulness may we go about the duties of our calling when we have been *in the mount* with God, and from thence fetch a double blessing into our worldly employments, and thus have them sanctified to us by the word and prayer! It is our wisdom and duty so to manage our religious exercises as that they may befriend our worldly business, and so to manage our worldly business as that it may be no enemy to our religious exercises.

2. Peter having *attended* upon Christ in his *preaching*, Christ will *accompany* him in his *fishing*. He staid with Christ at the shore, and now Christ will *launch out* with him *into the deep*. Note, Those that will be constant followers of Christ shall have him a constant guide to them.

3. Christ ordered Peter and his ship's crew to *cast their nets into the sea*, which they did, in obedience to him, though they had been hard at it all night, and had *caught nothing*, v. 4, 5. We may observe here,

(1.) How melancholy their business had now been: "*Master, we have toiled all the night, when we should have been asleep in our beds, and have taken nothing, but have had our labour for our pains.*" One would have thought that this should have excused them from hearing the sermon; but such a love had they to the word of God that it was more refreshing and reviving to them, after a wearisome night, than the softest slumbers. But they mention it to Christ, when he bids them go a fishing again. Note,

[1.] Some *callings* are much more *toilsome* than others are, and more perilous; yet Providence has so ordered it for the common good that there is no useful calling so discouraging but some or other have a genius for it.

Those who follow their business, and get abundance by it with a great deal of ease, should think with compassion of those who cannot follow theirs but with a great fatigue, and hardly get a bare livelihood by it. When we have *rested all night*, let us not forget those who have *toiled all night*, as Jacob, when he kept Laban's sheep.

[2.] Be the calling ever so laborious, it is good to see people diligent in it, and make the best of it; these fishermen, that were thus *industrious*, Christ singled out for his favourites. They were fit to be preferred as good soldiers of Jesus Christ who had thus learned to *endure hardness*.

[3.] Even those who are most diligent in their business often meet with disappointments; they who *toiled all night yet caught nothing*; for the *race* is not always *to the swift*. God will have us to be diligent, purely in duty to his command and dependence upon his goodness, rather than with an assurance of worldly success. We must do our duty, and then leave the event to God.

[4.] When we are tired with our worldly business, and crossed in our worldly affairs, we are welcome to come to Christ, and spread our case before him, who will take cognizance of it.

(2.) How ready their obedience was to the command of Christ:
Nevertheless, at thy word, I will let down the net.

[1.] Though they had *toiled all night*, yet, if Christ bid them, they will renew their toil, for they know that they who *wait on him shall renew their strength*, as work is renewed upon their hands; for every fresh service they shall have a fresh supply of *grace sufficient*.

[2.] Though they have *taken nothing*, yet, if Christ bid them *let down for a draught*, they will hope to take *something*. Note, We must not abruptly quit the callings wherein we are called because we have not the success in them we promised ourselves. The ministers of the gospel must continue to *let down that net*, though they have perhaps *toiled long and caught nothing*; and this is thank-worthy, to continue unwearied in our labours, though we see not the success of them.

[3.] In this they have an eye to the *word of Christ*, and a dependence upon that: "*At thy word, I will let down the net*, because thou dost enjoin it, and thou dost encourage it." We are *then* likely to speed well when we follow the guidance of Christ's word.

4. The draught of fish they caught was so much beyond what was ever known that it amounted to a miracle (v. 6): They *enclosed a great multitude of fishes*, so that *their net broke*, and yet, which is strange, they did not lose their draught. It was so great a *draught* that they had not hands sufficient to draw it up; but they were obliged to beckon to their partners, who were at a distance, out of call, to come and help them, v. 7. But the greatest evidence of the vastness of the draught was that they filled both the ships with fish, to such a degree that they overloaded them, and they *began to sink*, so that the fish had like to have been lost again with their own weight. Thus many an overgrown estate, raised out of the water, returns to the place whence it came. Suppose these ships were but five or six tons a piece, what a vast quantity of fish must there be to *load*, nay to *over-load*, them both!

Now by this vast draught of fishes,

(1.) Christ intended to show his *dominion* in the *seas* as well as on the *dry land*, over its *wealth* as over its *waves*. Thus he would show that he was that *Son of man* under whose feet all things were put, and particularly the *fish of the sea* and *whatsoever passeth through the paths of the sea*, ~~108~~ Psalm 8:8.

(2.) He intended hereby to confirm the doctrine he had just now preached out of Peter's ship. We may suppose that the people on shore, who heard the sermon, having a notion that the preacher was a prophet sent of God, carefully attended his motions afterward, and staid halting about there, to see what he would do next; and this miracle immediately following would be a confirmation to their faith, of his being at least *a teacher come from God*.

(3.) He intended hereby to repay Peter for the loan of his boat; for Christ's gospel now, as his ark formerly in the house of Obed-edom, will be sure to make amends, rich amends, for its kind entertainment. None shall *shut a door or kindle a fire* in God's house *for nought*, ~~300~~ Malachi 1:10. Christ's recompences for services done to his name are abundant, they are superabundant.

(4.) He intended hereby to give a specimen, to those who were to be his ambassadors to the world, of the success of their embassy, that though they might for a time, and in one particular place, *toil* and *catch nothing*,

yet they should be instrumental to bring in many to Christ, and enclose many in the gospel net.

5. The impression which this miraculous draught of fishes made upon Peter was very remarkable.

(1.) All *concerned* were *astonished*, and the more *astonished* for their being *concerned*. All the boat's crew were *astonished at the draught of fishes which they had taken* (v. 9); they were all surprised; and the more they considered it, and all the circumstances of it, the more they were *wonder-struck*, I had almost said *thunder-struck*, at the thought of it, *and so were also James and John, who were partners with Simon* (v. 10), and who, for aught that appears, were not so well acquainted with Christ, before this, as Peter and Andrew were. Now they were the more *affected* with it,

[1.] Because they *understood* it better than others did. They that were well acquainted with this sea, and it is probable had plied upon it many years, had never seen such a draught of fishes fetched out of it, nor any thing like it, any thing near it; and therefore they could not be tempted to diminish it, as others might, by suggesting that it was accidental at this *time*, and what might as well have happened at *any time*. It greatly corroborates the evidence of Christ's miracles that those who were best *acquainted* with them most *admired* them.

[2.] Because they were most *interested* in it, and *benefited* by it. Peter and his part-owners were gainers by this great draught of fishes; it was a rich booty for them and therefore it transported them, and their *joy* was a *helper* to their *faith*. Note, When Christ's works of wonder are to us, in particular, works of grace, then especially they command our faith in his doctrine.

(2.) Peter, above all the rest, was astonished to such a degree that he *fell down at Jesus's knees*, as he sat in the stern of his boat, and said, as one in an ecstasy or transport, that knew not where he was or what he said, *Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord*, v. 8. Not that he feared the weight of the fish would sink him because he was a sinful man, but that he thought himself unworthy of the favour of Christ's presence in his boat, and worthy that it should be to him a matter rather of terror than of comfort. This word of Peter's came from the same principle with theirs who, under the Old-Testament, so often said that they did *exceedingly fear*

and quake at the extraordinary display of the divine glory and majesty. It was the language of Peter's humility and self-denial, and had not the least tincture of the devils' dialect, *What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God?*

[1.] His acknowledgment was very just, and what it becomes us all to make: *I am a sinful man, O Lord*. Note, Even the *best men* are *sinful men*, and should be ready upon all occasions to own it, and especially to own it to Jesus Christ; for to whom else, but to him who came into the world to *save sinners*, should *sinful men* apply themselves?

[2.] His inference from it was what *might have been* just, though really it was not so. If I be a *sinful man*, as indeed I am, I ought to say, "*Come to me, O Lord*, or let me come to thee, or I am undone, *for ever undone*." But, considering what reason *sinful men* have to tremble before the holy Lord God and to dread his wrath, Peter may well be excused, if, in a sense of his own sinfulness and vileness, he cried out on a sudden, *Depart from me*. Note, Those whom Christ designs to admit to the most *intimate acquaintance* with him he first makes sensible that they deserve to be set at the *greatest distance* from him. We must all own ourselves *sinful men*, and that therefore Jesus Christ might justly *depart from us*; but we must *therefore fall down at his knees*, to pray him that he would not depart; for *woe unto us* if he *leave us*, if the Saviour depart from the sinful man.

6. The occasion which Christ took from this to intimate to Peter (v. 10), and soon after to James and John (⁴⁰²Matthew 4:21), his purpose to make them his apostles, and instruments of planting his religion in the world. He *said unto Simon*, who was in the greatest surprise of any of them at this prodigious draught of fishes, "*Thou shalt both see and do greater things than these; fear not; let not this astonish thee; be not afraid that, after having done thee this honour, it is so great that I shall never do thee more; no, henceforth thou shalt catch men*, by enclosing them in the gospel net, and that shall be a greater instance of the Redeemer's power, and his favour to thee, than this is; that shall be a more *astonishing* miracle, and infinitely more *advantageous* than this." When by Peter's preaching *three thousand souls* were, *in one day*, added to the church, then the type of this great draught of fishes was abundantly answered.

Lastly, The fishermen's farewell to their calling, in order to their constant attendance on Christ (v. 11): *When they had brought their ships to land*, instead of going to seek for a market for their fish, that they might make

the best hand they could of this miracle, they *forsook all and followed him*, being more solicitous to serve the interests of Christ than to advance any secular interests of their own. It is observable that they *left all to follow Christ*, when their calling prospered in their hands more than ever it had done and they had had uncommon success in it. When *riches increase*, and we are therefore most in temptation to *set our hearts* upon them, then to quit them for the service of Christ, this is *thank-worthy*.

LUKE 5:12-16

A LEPER CLEANSED

Here is,

I. The cleansing of a leper, v. 12-14. This narrative we had both in Matthew and Mark. It is here said to have been *in a certain city* (v. 12); it was in Capernaum, but the evangelist would not name it, perhaps because it was a reflection upon the government of the city that a leper was suffered to be *in it*. This man is said to be *full of leprosy*; he had that distemper in a high degree, which the more fitly represents our natural pollution by sin; we are *full of that leprosy, from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot there is no soundness in us*. Now let us learn here,

1. What we must do in the sense of our spiritual leprosy.

(1.) We must *seek Jesus*, enquire after him, acquaint ourselves with him, and reckon the discoveries made to us of Christ by the gospel the most acceptable and welcome discoveries that could be made to us.

(2.) We must humble ourselves before him, as this leper, seeing Jesus, *fell on his face*. We must be *ashamed* of our pollution, and, in the sense of it, blush to lift up our faces before the *holy Jesus*.

(3.) We must earnestly desire to be *cleansed* from the defilement, and cured of the disease, of sin, which renders us unfit for communion with God.

(4.) We must firmly believe Christ's ability and sufficiency to cleanse us: Lord, *thou canst make me clean*, though I be *full of leprosy*. No doubt is to be made of the merit and grace of Christ.

(5.) We must be importunate in prayer for pardoning mercy and renewing grace: *He fell on his face and besought him*; they that would be cleansed must reckon it a favour worth wrestling for.

(6.) We must refer ourselves to the good-will of Christ: *Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst*. This is not so much the language of his *diffidence*, or *distrust* of the good-will of Christ, as of his submission and reference of himself and his case to the will, to the good-will, of Jesus Christ.

2. What we may expect from Christ, if we thus apply ourselves to him.

(1.) We shall find him very *condescending* and forward to take cognizance of our case (v. 13): *He put forth his hand and touched him*. When Christ visited this leprous world, unasked, unsought unto, he showed how low he could stoop, to do good. His *touching* the leper was wonderful condescension; but it is much greater to us when he is himself *touched with the feeling of our infirmities*.

(2.) We shall find him very *compassionate*, and ready to relieve us; he said, *“I will, never doubt of that; whosoever comes to me to be healed, I will in no wise cast him out.”* He is as willing to cleanse leprous souls as they can be to be cleansed.

(3.) We shall find him all-sufficient, and able to heal and cleanse us, though we be ever so full of this loathsome leprosy. One word, one touch, from Christ, did the business: *Immediately the leprosy departed from him*. If Christ saith, *“I will, be thou justified, be thou sanctified,”* it is done; for he has power on earth to *forgive* sin, and power to give the Holy Spirit, ~~411~~ 1 Corinthians 6:11.

3. What he requires from those that are cleansed, v. 14. Has Christ sent his word and healed us?

(1.) We must be very *humble* (v. 14): *He charged him to tell no man*. This, it should seem, did not forbid him telling it to the honour of Christ, but he must not tell it to his own honour. Those whom Christ hath healed and cleansed must know that he hath done it in such a way as for ever excludes boasting.

(2.) We must be very *thankful*, and make a grateful acknowledgment of the divine grace: *Go, and offer for thy cleansing*. Christ did not require

him to give him a fee, but to bring the sacrifice of praise to God; so far was he from using his power to the prejudice of the law of Moses.

(3.) We must *keep close to our duty*; go to the priest, and those that attend him. The man whom Christ had made whole he *found in the temple*, ~~434~~ John 5:14. Those who by any affliction have been detained from public ordinances should, when the affliction is removed, attend on them the more diligently, and adhere to them the more constantly.

4. Christ's *public serviceableness* to men and his *private communion* with God; these are put together here, to give lustre to each other.

(1.) Though never any had so much *pleasure* in his *retirements* as Christ had, yet he was *much in a crowd*, to do good, v. 15. Though the leper should altogether hold his peace, yet the thing could not be hid, *so much the more went there a fame abroad of him*. The more he sought to conceal himself under a veil of humility, the more notice did people take of him; for honour is like a shadow, which flees from those that pursue it (*for a man to seek his own glory is not glory*), but follows those that decline it, and draw from it. The less good men say of themselves, the more will others say of them. But Christ reckoned it a small honour to him that his *fame went abroad*; it was much more so that hereby multitudes were brought to receive benefit by him.

[1.] By his preaching. They came together to *hear* him, and to receive instruction from him concerning the kingdom of God.

[2.] By his miracles. They came *to be healed by him of their infirmities*; that invited them to come to hear him, confirmed his doctrine, and recommended it.

(2.) Though never any did so much *good in public*, yet he found time for *pious and devout retirements* (v. 16): *He withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed*; not that he needed to avoid either distraction or ostentation, but he would set us an example, who need to order the circumstances of our devotion so as to guard against both. It is likewise our wisdom so to order our affairs as that our public work and our secret work may not intrench upon, nor interfere with, one another. Note, Secret prayer must be performed secretly; and those that have ever so much to do of the best business in this world must keep up constant stated times for it.

LUKE 5:17-26

CURE OF A PARALYTIC

Here is,

I. A general account of Christ's preaching and miracles, v. 17.

1. He was *teaching on a certain day*, not on the sabbath day, then he would have said so, but on a *week-day*; *six days shalt thou labour*, not only for *the world*, but for *the soul*, and the welfare of that. Preaching and hearing the word of *God* are *good works*, if they be *done well*, any day in the *week*, as well as on sabbath days. It was not in the *synagogue*, but in a *private house*; for even there where we ordinarily converse with our friends it is not improper to give and receive good instruction.

2. There he *taught*, he *healed* (as before, v. 15): *And the power of the Lord was to heal them* — *en eis to iasthai autous*. It was *mighty* to heal them; it was *exerted* and *put forth* to heal them, to heal those whom he *taught* (we may understand it so), to heal their souls, to cure them of their spiritual diseases, and to give them a new life, a new nature. Note, Those who receive the word of Christ in faith will find a divine power going along with that word, to *heal them*; for Christ came with his comforts to *heal the broken-hearted*, ~~obs~~ Luke 4:18. The power of the Lord is *present* with the word, *present to those* that pray for it and submit to it, *present to heal them*. Or it may be meant (and so it is generally taken) of the healing of those who were *diseased in body*, who came to him for cures. Whenever there was occasion, Christ had not *to seek* for his power, it was *present to heal*.

3. There were some grandees present in this assembly, and, as it should seem, more than usual: *There were Pharisees, and doctors of the law, sitting by*; not sitting *at his feet*, to learn of him; then I should have been willing to take the following clause as referring to those who are spoken of immediately before (the *power of the Lord was present to heal them*); and why might not the word of Christ reach their hearts? But, by what follows (v. 21), it appears that they were *not healed*, but cavilled at Christ, which compels us to refer this to others, not to them; for they *sat by* as *persons unconcerned*, as if the word of Christ were nothing to them. They sat by as spectators, censors, and spies, to pick up something on which to ground a

reproach or accusation. How many are there in the midst of our assemblies, where the gospel is preached, that do not *sit under* the word, but *sit by*! It is to them as a *tale* that is *told them*, not as a *message* that is *sent them*; they are willing that we should preach *before them*, not that we should preach *to them*. These Pharisees and scribes (or doctors of the law) *came out of every town of Galilee, and Judea, and Jerusalem*; they came from all parts of the nation. Probably, they appointed to meet at this time and place, to see what remarks they could make upon Christ and what he said and did. They were in a confederacy, as those that said, *Come, and let us devise devices against Jeremiah*, and agree to *smite him with the tongue*, ^{<218>}Jeremiah 18:18. *Report, and we will report it*, ^{<210>}Jeremiah 20:10. Observe, Christ went on with his work of *preaching* and *healing*, though he saw these Pharisees, and doctors of the Jewish church, *sitting by*, who, he knew, *despised* him, and watched to *ensnare him*.

II. A particular account of the cure of the man *sick of the palsy*, which was related much as it is here by both the foregoing evangelists: let us therefore only observe in short,

1. The doctrines that are taught us and confirmed to us by the story of this cure.

(1.) That sin is the fountain of all sickness, and the forgiveness of sin is the only foundation upon which a recovery from sickness can comfortably be built. They presented the *sick man* to Christ, and he said, "*Man, thy sins are forgiven thee* (v. 20), that is the blessing thou art most to prize and seek; for if thy sins be forgiven thee, though the sickness be continued, it is in mercy; if they be not, though the sickness be removed, it is in wrath." The cords of our iniquity are the bands of our affliction.

(2.) That Jesus Christ has power on earth to *forgive sins*, and his healing diseases was an *incontestable* proof of it. This was the thing intended to be proved (v. 24): *That ye may know and believe that the Son of man*, though now upon earth in his state of humiliation, *hath power to forgive sins*, and to release sinners, upon gospel terms, from the eternal punishment of sin, he *saith to the sick of the palsy, Arise, and walk*; and he is cured immediately. Christ claims one of the prerogatives of the King of kings when he undertakes to *forgive sin*, and it is justly expected that he should produce a good proof of it. "Well," saith he, "I will put it upon this issue: here is a man struck with a palsy, and *for his sin*; if I do not with a word's

speaking cure his disease in an instant, which cannot be done by nature or art, but purely by the immediate power and efficacy of the God of nature, then say that I am not entitled to the prerogative of forgiving sin, am not the Messiah, am not the Son of God and King of Israel: but, if I do, you must own that *I have power to forgive sins.*” Thus it was put upon a fair trial, and one word of Christ determined it. He did but say, *Arise, take up thy couch,* and that *chronical* disease had an *instantaneous* cure; *immediately he arose before them.* They must all own that there could be no cheat or fallacy in it. They that brought him could attest how perfectly *lame* he was before; they that saw him could attest how perfectly *well* he was now, insomuch that he had strength enough to take up and carry away the bed he lay upon. How well is it for us that this most comfortable doctrine of the gospel, that *Jesus Christ, our Redeemer and Saviour,* has *power to forgive sin,* has such a full attestation!

(3.) That Jesus Christ is God. He appears to be so,

[1.] By *knowing the thoughts* of the scribes and Pharisees (v. 22), which it is God's prerogative to do, though these scribes and Pharisees knew as well how to conceal their thoughts, and keep their countenances, as most men, and probably were industrious to do it at this time, for they *lay in wait secretly.*

[2.] By doing that which their thoughts owned none could do but God only (v. 21): *Who can forgive sins,* say they, *but only God?* “I will prove,” saith Christ, “that I can forgive sins;” and what follows then but that *he is God?* What horrid wickedness then were *they* guilty of who charged him with speaking the *worst of blasphemies,* even when he spoke the *best of blessings, Thy sins are forgiven thee!*

2. The duties that are taught us, and recommended to us, by this story.

(1.) In our applications to Christ, we must be very *pressing* and *urgent:* that is an evidence of faith, and is very pleasing to Christ and prevailing with him. They that were the friends of this sick man *sought means to bring him in before Christ* (v. 18); and, when they were baffled in their endeavour, they did not give up their cause; but when they could not get in by *the door,* it was so crowded, they untiled the house, and let the poor patient down through the roof, *into the midst before Jesus,* v. 19. In this Jesus Christ *saw their faith,* v. 20. Now here he has taught us (and it were well if we could learn the lesson) to *put the best construction* upon words

and actions that they *will bear*. When the centurion and the woman of Canaan were in no care at all to bring the patients they interceded for into Christ's presence, but believed that he could cure them *at a distance*, he commended *their faith*. But though in *these* there seemed to be a *different* notion of the thing, and an apprehension that it was requisite the *patient* should be *brought into his presence*, yet he did not *censure* and *condemn* their weakness, did not ask them, “Why do you give this disturbance to the assembly? Are you under such a degree of infidelity as to think I could not have cured him, though he had been out of doors?” But he made the best of it, and even in *this* he saw *their faith*. It is a comfort to us that we serve a Master that is willing to *make the best* of us.

(2.) When we are sick, we should be more in care to get our sins pardoned than to get our sickness removed. Christ, in what he said to this man, taught us, when we seek to God for health, to begin with seeking to him for pardon.

(3.) The mercies which we have the comfort of God must have the praise of. The man *departed to his own house, glorifying God*, v. 25. To him belong the escapes from death, and in them therefore he must be *glorified*.

(4.) The miracles which Christ wrought were *amazing* to those that saw them, and we ought to *glorify* God in them, v. 26. They said, “*We have seen strange things to-day*, such as we never saw before, nor our fathers before us; they are altogether new.” But they *glorified* God, who had sent into their country such a benefactor to it; and were *filled with fear*, with a reverence of God, with a jealous persuasion that this was the Messiah and that he was not treated by their nation as he ought to be, which might prove in the end the ruin of their state; perhaps they were some such thoughts as these that *filled them with fear*, and a concern likewise for themselves.

~~157~~ LUKE 5:27-39

THE CALL OF MATTHEW

All this, except the last verse, we had before in Matthew and Mark; it is not the story of any *miracle in nature* wrought by our Lord Jesus, but it is an account of some of the *wonders of his grace*, which, to those who

understand things aright, are no less cogent proofs of Christ's being sent of God than the other.

I. It was a wonder of his grace that he would call a *publican*, from the *receipt of custom*, to be his disciple and follower, v. 27. It was wonderful condescension that he should admit poor fishermen to that honour, men of the *lowest rank*; but much more wonderful that he should admit *publicans*, men of the *worst reputation*, men of *ill fame*. In this Christ *humbled himself*, and appeared *in the likeness of sinful flesh*. By this he *exposed himself*, and got the invidious character of a *friend of publicans and sinners*.

II. It was a wonder of his grace that the call was made *effectual*, became immediately so, v. 28. This publican, though those of that employment commonly had little inclination to religion, for his religion's sake left a good place in the custom-house (which, probably, was his livelihood, and where he stood fair for better preferment), and *rose up, and followed Christ*. There is no heart too hard for the Spirit and grace of Christ to work upon, nor any difficulties in the way of a sinner's conversion insuperable to his power.

III. It was a wonder of his grace that he would not only admit a converted publican into his family, but would keep company with unconverted publicans, that he might have an opportunity of doing their souls good; he justified himself in it, as agreeing with the great design of his coming into the world. Here is a wonder of grace indeed, that Christ undertakes to be the Physician of souls *distempered* by sin, and ready to *die* of the distemper (he is a Healer by office, v. 31) — that he has a particular regard to the sick, to sinners as his patients, convinced awakened sinners, that see their need of the Physician — that he came to call *sinners*, the worst of sinners, to repentance, and to assure them of pardon, upon repentance, v. 32. These are glad tidings of great joy indeed.

IV. It was a wonder of his grace that he did so patiently bear the *contradiction of sinners* against himself and his disciples, v. 30. He did not express his resentment of the cavils of the scribes and Pharisees, as he justly might have done, but answered them with reason and meekness; and, instead of taking that occasion to show his displeasure against the Pharisees, as afterwards he did, or of recriminating upon them, he took

that occasion to show his compassion to poor publicans, another sort of sinners, and to encourage them.

V. It was a wonder of his grace that, in the discipline under which he trained up his disciples, he *considered their frame*, and proportioned their services to their strength and standing, and to the circumstances they were in. It was objected, as a blemish upon his conduct, that he did not make *his disciples to fast* so often as those of the *Pharisees* and John Baptist did, v. 33. He insisted most upon that which is the *soul* of fasting, the mortification of sin, the crucifying of the flesh, and the living of a life of self-denial, which is as much better than fasting and corporal penances as *mercy* is better than *sacrifice*.

VI. It was a wonder of his grace that Christ reserved the trials of his disciples for their latter times, when by his grace they were in some good measure better prepared and fitted for them than they were at first. Now they were as the *children of the bride-chamber*, when the *bridegroom is with them*, when they have plenty and joy, and every day is a festival. Christ was welcomed wherever he came, and they for his sake, and as yet they met with little or no opposition; but this will not last always. *The days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them*, v. 35. When Christ shall leave them with their hearts full of sorrow, their hands full of work, and the world full of enmity and rage against them, *then shall they fast*, shall not be so well fed as they are now. *We both hunger and thirst and are naked*, ^{<EPI>}1 Corinthians 4:11. Then they shall keep many more *religious fasts* than they do now, for Providence will call them to it; they will then serve the Lord *with fastings*, ^{<ACT>}Acts 13:2.

VII. It was a wonder of his grace that he proportioned their exercises to their strength. He would not put *new cloth upon an old garment* (v. 36), nor *new wine into old bottles* (v. 37, 38); he would not, as soon as ever he had called them out of the world, put them upon the strictnesses and austerities of discipleship, lest they should be tempted to *fly off*. When God brought Israel out of Egypt, he would not bring them *by the way of the Philistines*, lest they should *repent*, when they *saw war*, and *return to Egypt*, ^{<EX>}Exodus 13:17. So Christ would train up his followers gradually to the discipline of his family; for no man, having *drank old wine*, will *of a sudden*, straightway, *desire new*, or relish it, but will say, *The old is better*, because he has been *used to it*, v. 39. The disciples will be tempted to think their old way of living better, till they are by degrees trained up to

this way whereunto they are called. Or, turn it the other way: “Let them be *accustomed* awhile to religious exercises, and then they will *abound* in them as much as you do: but we must not be too hasty with them.” Calvin takes it as an admonition to the Pharisees not to boast of their fasting, and the noise and show they made with it, nor to despise his disciples because they did not in like manner *signalize* themselves; for the profession the Pharisees made was indeed *pompous* and *gay*, like *new wine* that is brisk and sparkling, whereas all wise men say, *The old is better*; for, though it does not give its colour so well in the cup, yet it is more warming in the stomach and more wholesome. Christ's disciples, though they had not so much of the *form of godliness*, had more of the *power of it*.