

# Life and Leading

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     So Luke's Gospel chapter 5, and it's a continuation of the description of Luke of Jesus' public ministry.

One day, as Jesus was standing by the lake of Gennesaret with the people crowding around him and listening to the word of God, he saw at the water's edge two boats left there by the fishermen who were washing their nets.

He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. And then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, Put out into deep water and let down the nets for a catch. Simon answered, Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything.

But because you say so, I will let down the nets. When he had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break.

[ 1 : 0 4 ]     So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.

When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' feet at knees and said, Go away from me, Lord, I'm a sinful man.

For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken. And so were James and John the sons of Zebedee Simon's partners.

Then Jesus said to Simon, Don't be afraid, from now on you will catch men. So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

Now I just want to speak for a few moments about this section before moving on. So there will be four short, sharp sessions on teaching from this chapter.

[ 2 : 0 0 ]     And there's a great buzz, actually, it would be quite good to read through the chapter, the whole chapter as well, because there's a great buzz about this chapter as there's the revelation of Jesus' work and it's the revelation of Jesus on the move.

And there's a real kind of, and I do believe Luke has intended this, there's a kind of happy chaos about this chapter. It just moves from one event to another with lots of action and lots of work and lots of people.

You know, it's the kind of happy chaos of life. You know, like a happily content, serene, married couple who have a baby.

And all of a sudden there's chaos in their life with this new addition. And everything is chaotic and turned upside down. And there's action all the time. Or if you've gone for a nice, quiet, relaxing, romantic meal in a restaurant, there's nobody else there.

And it's lovely and serene. Until a party of 30 people come in and all of a sudden there's a hubbub and there's noise and the waiter's going here and there and there's food flying about.

[ 3 : 07 ] And it's all the chaotic kind of involvement of people and of life. And that's the picture in a sense that we have here is of the life of Jesus, the spiritual message of Jesus impacting on so many people.

And there's a kind of happy chaos about what is going on. And while I don't want the service to be a happy chaotic service, I want to reflect that quick movement by looking at the passage in sections.

And this section is really all about, again, it's about Jesus leading us. Let Jesus lead you. It's the call of the first disciples. And you know the story, I'm not going to spend time going over the story, you've read it and you know it.

But here the disciples, they would have known of Jesus. They heard of Jesus, they were listening to Jesus at different times. And they'd been fishing all night. Jesus was preaching in the morning and they were happy to let Jesus do what He did.

Happy to let Him preach and happy even to let Him use their boat to be a platform for Him to preach to the crowds. But then He interferes with their life and He says, cast your nets out again and fish.

[ 4 : 26 ] Peter said, wait a minute Jesus, you're the preacher, I'm the fisherman, okay? But He demands of Peter obedience and lordship in this area.

Peter was possibly quite proud and independent about this. This was his problem. He did a long night, he hadn't caught any fish, but Jesus, this is my problem.

This is my area of life. This is my area of expertise. You carry on preaching, but nonetheless, because he recognized a sense of authority about Jesus and His message.

He obeyed Jesus and we see this magnificent miracle happening, which is a precursor for His call. Put down your nets, follow me, I will make you fishers of men.

And it's a kind of picture for him about the importance of trusting Jesus and that Jesus had a purpose for Peter and the disciples, which was higher and more significant at one level than what he was doing.

[ 5 : 28 ] But that he was being asked to put his faith and his trust in Jesus. And Jesus did so interestingly, not in a spiritual realm at one level, but in the area where Peter thought he was an expert when it came to fishing.

Now sometimes, I think for ourselves, we can make that same dichotomy in our lives with Jesus, can't we? That there are no go areas for Jesus. We're happy to have Jesus speak to us from the Bible on a Sunday and we're happy for the religious bit of our lives to be governed by Jesus.

But in the rest of our week, when we leave here, when we go into our studies, when we go into our jobs, when we go into our relationships, that's where we are expert. That's where we're in control.

That's where we decide what we want to do. And Jesus is no part there. And yet very much Jesus is saying, from this passage and others also in God's word, you know, allow me to be Lord of all of your lives, of the areas even where you think you're an expert.

Allow me to be your Lord and your Savior and your God. And particularly if you come today, as Peter came to be in contact with Jesus as he was facing a practical, but you know, a real problem with his work.

[ 6 : 47 ] Didn't catch any fish. Maybe you're coming today to God's house with many practical, real difficulties, struggles, problems in your day-to-day living.

And you say, let's get nothing to do with Jesus. I'll sort it on my own. I'm the expert. And maybe today Jesus is saying, look, commitment and trust is all about putting your faith in me beyond these doors when you leave this house and in your day-to-day living.

Because I have a purpose for you. I have a plan for you. And I want you to trust me secular in the secular problems you face, in the reality of your life and spiritually.

You are to allow me to be Lord and Savior. There's no, no go areas in our lives for Jesus Christ. And he wants us to recognize that Lordship and follow Him.

And maybe today there is that very strong sense in which Jesus Christ is calling you to follow Him. Even in your everyday life, even from your everyday life, He wants us to be living sacrifices not in the pew or not just in the pew, but in our day-to-day living where we allow Christ in to look at and deal with and solve the troubles and the difficulties and the trials we face.

[ 8 : 12 ] And we trust Him to do so. Because He is sovereign. He is the miracle working Savior. And He wants us to follow Him and allow His leadership of our lives and allow His guidance for us.

See that is really what the Bible speaks of. And that's what Christianity is about. And that's what sin is about. Sin is basically saying, don't care, don't trust.

Isn't it? Basically, that's what it's saying. Don't care enough, don't trust enough. It's all about trust in many ways.

And Jesus is saying, as He calls us to trust Him, to love Him, to be redeemed by Him, to recognize His absolute goodness, His power and His love and His purpose for our lives.

Let Jesus lead you. That is part of the message of this calling of the disciples. To entrust our troubles, our difficulties, our doubts, our fears, our impossibilities to this living Savior.

[ 9 : 27 ] He is not God in a box. And He mustn't be God just in a church. We must allow Him the Lordship of our lives. And if you're sitting here uncommitted to Jesus, believing but uncommitted, unwilling to give yourself entrust to Him, then I urge you to hear His voice and say, follow Me.

He is a purpose and He has a great love for your life and for you and He is a good God.

The second thing that I want to speak about here from the chapter is that Jesus walks a different road. He calls us to follow Him, but He also calls us to follow Him on a different road.

Now this is a part of Scripture where Jesus is evident very much by His power. And there's a newness about what is going on. He is there and the Word is getting around.

And when Jesus is present and when He's present in His power, there's very often a kind of formula of events that take place or a kind of...

[ 10 : 37 ] Same kind of things happen. There's always people who have a sense of their own need. There's very often healings. People recognise to one degree or another Christ's Lordship.

There's great power and there's life. And there's another thing, there's crowds. Very often, particularly in the early part of the Gospels, there's crowds of people.

And maybe as we sit here today, and maybe if you think about the church, I'm not sure if you do or not, but if you do, maybe you think, that would be brilliant for today. That would be great in the church. Wouldn't it be great if there was evident spiritual power?

If Jesus was among us, an evident healing power, bringing folk to Himself and where there's large crowds and where He is attracting everyone to hear Him and where people are falling down on their knees and recognising His Lordship.

Wouldn't that be tremendous for the church if we had headlines and if we had high profile and if we had crowds of people coming? Isn't that the kind of ideal?

[ 11 : 42 ] Isn't that what we're looking for? All of that to be drawn in and for Christ to be glorified through that. Of course we do.

But what did Christ do when that happened? What did Christ do when there was all these crowds and when there was all that evident power and where there was a sense of people acknowledging His Lordship?

He withdrew alone to pray. That is what Jesus did. He was crazy. Surely, He should, talk about being seeker and sensitive.

He should have been there with the crowds. We should not have been lapping up the adoration. We should not have been teaching and telling them and bringing them to Himself, this great crowds of people.

But He went, withdrew alone, we're told in verse 16. Often He withdrew to lonely places and prayed. Why did Jesus do that?

[ 12 : 37 ] Why would He do that? It's so insensitive. Surely Jesus knew their hearts and knew the hearts of humanity because we can see it unfolding throughout the Gospels.

We are appreciated the motives of so many of them were impure. And lots of them were just looking for magic. They were looking for miracles. They were looking for great things to happen just to satisfy their own curiosity.

They might have even wanted healings just for their own reasons. But we know that once Jesus began to teach them the truth about Himself and about themselves, we're told in the Gospels from that point on many people turned away from Jesus and followed Him no longer.

The crowds dissipated. And that same crowd that would have come here to adore and to watch what was happening would have not been terribly different from the crowd that shortly after cried, Crucify Him.

Crucify Him. They didn't want Him anymore. So Jesus recognized that and He recognized that His power and His ministry needed to be resourced and strengthened not from on the back of popularity or on a public perception but on the resourcing and new from the living God.

[ 14 : 02 ] He became that dependent Son who went to His Father and was strengthened by the Holy Spirit in a beautifully mysterious way that we've been looking at with regard to the Trinity.

And I would challenge us to recognize that that is also both as a church and as individuals where our focus must lie.

Whatever else happens, however else God blesses us and it may be with crowds and with power and with evident work of the Holy Spirit. Or we have a responsibility, can I say this carefully, to retreat.

I don't mean that in a cowardly way. I mean that in recognizing where our strength lies. We must be serving God in relationship with Him.

We must be dependent as believers both in our congregational lives but also as individuals. We must be those who know how to withdraw and resource ourselves again from God to sense His love, His direction, His wisdom.

[ 15 : 18 ] Because when we recognize that, I have no doubt that we will be thrown out into the chaotic life of the church and of Christianity where Christ is powerful.

I'm not encouraging monasticism but recognizing where our relationship with Him lies. Our faith as a church, if we can talk about corporate faith, doesn't lie in popularity or in crowds of people or in success.

However that may be measured. But in withdrawing as a people and being resourced by God, by praying often, by having that personal relationship with the tremendously counter-cultural, isn't it?

I've spent 20 years in the Christian ministry and I've spent 20 years in the Christian ministry rushing around like a headless chicken.

And I regret it with all my heart. I regret it. Our spiritual strength does not come from having a diary of work that is filled from dawn to dusk and proving to the Christian community around us how energetic and lively we are.

[ 16 : 43 ] It comes from God and from being in fellowship with Him. And that's no different from any of us. We are all in that position spiritually.

And Jesus is reminding His disciples here and reminding every single one who reads this word that our strength, if it was His strength, how much more must it be your strength and mine as fallen sinful believers to be in His company, to be in His fellowship, to be worshiping Him in that solitary place where we will understand Him.

This evening we're looking at the holiness of God. It's impossible for us to grasp the holiness of God unless we are in fellowship with Him. That is where we will rise from that place of solitariness to the chaos of church life, to the chaos of grace at work, to the chaos of loving people and serving people and putting them first and denying our own rights and our own needs.

That is the chaos of Christianity. It must be grounded in solitary walk with Him. Popularity, praise, utterly irrelevant spiritually.

So we'll read from verse 17, the next section. What's the big issue? One day as He was teaching Pharisees and teachers of the law who had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem were sitting there and the power of the Lord was present for Him to heal the sick.

[ 18 : 17 ] Some men came carrying a paralytic on a mat and tried to take Him into the house to lay Him before Jesus. When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered Him on His mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd right in front of Jesus.

In Jesus' s other faith He said, friend, your sins are forgiven. The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy?

Who can forgive sins but God alone? Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, why are you thinking these things in your hearts? Which is easier to say your sins are forgiven or to say get up and walk, but that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins?

He said to the paralysed man, I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home. Immediately He stood up in front of them, took what He had been lying on and went home praising God.

Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, we have seen remarkable things today. After this Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth.

[ 19 : 29 ] Follow me, Jesus said to him, and Levi left everything and followed him. Then Levi held a great banquet for friends at his house and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them.

The Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners? Jesus answered them, it is not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick.

They have not come to call them righteous but sinners to repentance. So what's the big issue? Well it's clear here isn't it? You just simply don't have time to go into detail, we could take each of these sections and preach a sermon on them individually.

But let's get the big picture that we have here and the big issue is forgiveness of sins. You see Luke is here highlighting people's big issues in this chapter, isn't he?

He's highlighting what's important to people. We've had popularity in the bit we've just looked at. That was very important to a lot of people, big crowds and popularity.

[ 20 : 38 ] Then obviously in this section it's primarily about health, certainly the healing of the paralytic and many of other Jesus' miracles. It's about health. And with Levi who was a tax collector, the big issue was a lucrative career in the tax business, money for old rope, a good lifestyle.

And Jesus deals with all these issues here and strips away what is really important. And you know things haven't changed too much have they? When you think about the vast majority of people, what is the big issues, what are sorry the big issues for them?

Popularity would be one wouldn't it? I just want friends. Why is the sitcom, American sitcom friends so popular? Because it's about friends. It's about friendship.

It's about being liked, being loved, being accepted. Or it's about health isn't it? How often will you have heard people say to you, maybe we've said it ourselves.

I don't really worry about it as long as I've got my health. It's all that matters as long as I've got my health. Or it may be a lucrative career, you young powerful intelligence students looking ahead to your lives and thinking as long as I have a lucrative career, money enough to lavish the kind of lifestyle that I would like and do the things that I want and treat the family that I hope to have the way I would hope to treat them.

[ 22 : 08 ] None of these things are unimportant. None of these things don't matter. But Christ is challenging them as fundamental issues for your life.

As the core issues and he's saying rather, what is the most important thing that comes through this passage and through this section? It is a right relationship with God through the forgiveness of our sins.

It is what Christ, why did Christ withdraw? Why did He go to a lonely place? And He withdrew to that place because He recognized He needed the strength to go forward to the cross.

The cross was what He came to do. He came to die on the cross for you and for me, for our sins, to bring us peace with God. That's why when Satan and the temptation said, I'll give you all of these kingdoms now, what was it?

Popularity. And He said, no, I have to go another way, the way of the cross. And that is your most significant and my most significant issue now.

[ 23 : 20 ] That if you died tomorrow, undoubtedly, unspeakably the most important issue would be your relationship with God. Certainly, popularity, health and a lucrative career would have entirely dissolved as areas of any significance.

Your relationship with God and forgiveness of sins. That's why when He healed the Paralytic, and it's not that He didn't care about the physical conditions and the need of that man far from it, but He healed him in order that people would understand that He had the authority not just to heal, but to forgive sins because He said, first, your sins are forgiven.

Because He recognized for that man and for us, the core issue is our relationship with God, not our physical health.

And He's making no direct connection there, by the way, between that man's paralyzed condition and his need for forgiveness. No direct parallel. He wasn't necessarily in any way in that condition because of his own particular sins.

But He is highlighting something deeper that this man needs, that every single person needs forgiveness of sins. Peace with God. And that's why when He called Levi, He was calling Levi to a new life, to a new work, to a new relationship with Him that involved forgiveness of sins.

- [ 24 : 48 ] Not a lucrative career, so that Levi all of a sudden recognized that he needed to repent and enjoy spiritual healing and grace.

Grace so much that he shared it with all his pals. And that is and remains for us the big issue today. Now we can paper over the cracks of that by pursuing popularity.

We can ignore God altogether. There's no doubt about that. And I nor anyone else can persuade you otherwise. We can paper over it by pursuing popularity, by making that the goal of our life, by just being concerned about our health, keeping fit and living young, or by striving after a lucrative career.

All of these things we can do. You can drive God to the edge of significance of your life. And I say particularly a temptation of the younger generation throughout history.

Because we're strong, we're independent and we're gifted. And Jesus is saying, do you not need? Do you not trust?

- [ 25 : 58 ] That's sin, isn't it? That's rebellion. Don't need God. Don't trust Him. I want popularity, health, money.

Big issue is forgiveness. Because without forgiveness we can't know God. We can't know His love. We can't know His forgiveness.

We can't know His healing, which is absolutely core to every one of us in our lives. We can't know His direction and His wisdom and His grace and His help.

We can't know His security so that we have a purpose in life and where we die tomorrow we would go into His presence forever. We can't know Him and we can't change without Christ in our hearts.

We can't ruin ourselves. We can't deal with the bitterness and the sins and the depth of depravity that we have.

- [ 26 : 55 ] Jesus needs to gift us grace. And as Christians if we lose sight of the cross, redemption of sins, forgiveness as we have it here, then we lose all the beauty of Jesus.

We lose all the sense of being healed and needing healing. We lose all sense of perspective. We might not need any healing as far as the world around us is.

But God is saying your big issue is in relation with me. And He says you need cleansing. We'll see maybe a bit more clearly that tonight with regard to His holiness. But it is.

Is it not for us? It's a big issue. Let's bow our heads briefly in prayer before going to the last brief section. Lord God, help us.

We pray to understand that that is why you came. That you shunned any kind of shortcut to being our Savior.

- [ 27 : 53 ] And it wasn't a cheap and nasty salvation. It wasn't just look at me, be like me, try and look like what Jesus looked like and you'll be saved and be a Christian.

It is that He achieved salvation. He paid the price. He bore the wrath of God against our sins on the cross. And He is entitled and authoritative to forgive our sins.

Only He can do that. Maybe recognize your authority, your power, your outstanding love that would send you on our behalf to do that and recognize it as the great foundation of life.

The great foundation of perspective. The great foundation for living life to the full. And while we recognize all these other things as being important, being accepted, being popular in many ways, having enough money to get by and also being healthy, may we not idolize them and put them in a place that they oughtn't to be in because we recognize that God is the giver and ultimately in glory with Him we will have all these things in abundance.

Lord we pray for our congregation today. We pray for those in particular need. Pray for those who grieve the loss of loved ones in recent days.

[ 29 : 22 ] And we pray particularly for Donna, who's father died on Thursday, very suddenly and very unexpectedly. Be very close to Donna and her mum and her brothers this time of great sadness.

Remember others who will have known of this and who will have had their own wounds reopened. We pray that you would heal and redeem and soften and love them with all your heart.

We pray for those who are happy today, for those who rejoice in good experience and good lives and good blessings from you.

May we all be able to acknowledge you in the dark times and in the light times and give you thanks and give you glory for Jesus' sake.

Amen. Now can I read the last little section and we'll finish off with the same challenge as we began with about Jesus leading us.

[ 30 : 28 ] They said to him, verse 33, John's disciples often fast and pray and so do the disciples of the Pharisees but yours go on eating and drinking. Jesus answered.

Can you make the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? By the time they come, the bridegroom will be taken from them. In those days they will fast.

And they told him this parable, no one tears a patch from a new garment and sews it onto an old one. If he does, he will have torn the new garment and the patch from the new will not match the old.

And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins.

And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for he sees the old is better. Quite a difficult passage, quite a difficult area to finish with and we will not be going into detail but again the challenge is to allow Jesus to lead us because he is challenging us today to do two things, to rejoice and to fast.

[ 31 : 42 ] That's the challenge that he brings us in this passage. You see there's a newness about Jesus and the kingdom of God and he highlights that by reminding the Pharisees, the leaders who wanted to keep to the old ways and the Judaistic ways of the Old Testament.

He says that while the bridegroom is here and that is a reference to Jesus being with them, that they celebrate because there's a sense in which Jesus being among his people is a great cause of celebration, not just physically but for us in Christ.

And the old ways of Judaistic, ritualistic, outward religion were going to be gone and dead. The old way, but he did recognise that some people would prefer the old way.

You see no one after drinking old wine wants the new, he says the old is better. And it's a recognition of the sinful kind of stubbornness of not accepting Jesus, that we'd rather not have Him.

We'd rather the old ways of doing it ourselves, of being in control of just go to church now and again and that will satisfy divine justice and don't give me any of this about the bridegroom and Christ and what he means, the old ways of self-reliance and of darkness and of being in our own comfort zone.

[ 33 : 07 ] Jesus says rejoice because of being in the days of the kingdom and the days of Christ, rejoice like you would at a family wedding.

And that's an important aspect of our faith. I don't believe it is narrow just to, well Jesus was in earth, it speaks of our lives as Christians, rejoice like we would at a family wedding.

We had Susan and Randy's wedding kind of celebration for the end but I saw the things down in the hall last night. Great rejoicing, family wedding, happiness, feasting, tremendous.

And so often the Bible pictures salvation or mirrors it with a happy and blessed marriage, feasting and all that goes with the wedding ceremony.

And that rejoicing aspect, we're not very good at, we're not very good at in our do or presbyterian kind of background that we don't often rejoice and see as gifts and see as grace and see how great it is to have the door open to God and to the transformation that He brings.

[ 34 : 23 ] And it should be part of our lives that we rejoice through our Scripture that speaks about us rejoicing and not just so deep down in our hearts that no one sees it. Oh I am rejoicing way down deep there, really honestly.

People should know it, they should see it, they should experience it because it is part of our emotional life, it's part of who we are, it's part of what we are. Why can we rejoice in everything else?

Well all I want is to know, rejoice in Jesus, that's frivolous and that's liberal and weak and shallow, nonsense. That is rejoice in Christ and live rejoicing in Christ and show that in our worship too.

You know, lightning will not strike if we smile when we're singing His praises. But He also says, and the balance is there, fast because the days are evil.

You know this, He says, the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them. That description there is actually much more powerful, the word is much more powerful, it's ripped from them.

[ 35 : 28 ] The bridegroom is pulled away from them and it seems to be a very clear reference to His crucifixion and to His death and in those days they were fast. And it's a recognition, not that from the crucifixion on every believer fasts, but it's a recognition that the paradox of living the Christian life here and now is rejoicing but also recognizing the need for fasting.

We fast in order to feast. And we've lost sight of that today. She read through the New Testament, fasting is encouraged or it's taken for granted.

Not if you fast, but rather when you fast. And the disciples couldn't heal the poor boy who had a demon possession that threw him into the open fire and Jesus said no because that comes access to disciples while he was still on earth.

That alone comes out with fasting and prayer, seriousness of recognizing the spiritual battle required fasting. And so he wants us as Christians to focus our bodies and our minds seriously on being set apart for him, often withdrawing to lonely places and praying and maybe fasting.

Back isn't it back to the beginning? Back to solitary fellowship as disciples that we spend time recognizing yes, even fasting matters today.

[ 37 : 00 ] 21st century, Western materialistic society, you're asking me to fast? What do without my cornflakes? Surely not.

Surely all things have been given to us by God to enjoy. Absolutely. But voluntarily, freely, because we recognize that sometimes in fasting our minds and our hearts are channeled and controlled and focused, reminding ourselves that we're not bound by any of these things and he's looking for us to be serious because the days are evil and he wants us to fast and pray.

What a wonderful balance that is because it's as we do so, we will know vibrancy and spiritual life and health and dynamism that is unparalleled.

It certainly won't do us any harm. We'll rejoice like you would at a family wedding, fast because the days are evil.

Let Jesus lead us. Let's not lead him, but let Jesus lead us in our lives. Let us be those who withdraw and to pray, those who fellowship, those who recognize the centrality of forgiveness and the relationship with him and in so doing, I believe we will enjoy the happy chaos of spiritual life in this congregation and we'll be able to cope with it and that will be great.

[ 38 : 33 ] We're not far from chaos and I look forward to it.