

LUKE

Chapter 5

The Calling of the First Disciples

On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, 2 and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. 3 Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. 4 And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, **"Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch."** 5 And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." 6 And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. 7 They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. 8 But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." 9 For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, 10 and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, **"Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men."** 11 And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

Up to this point Luke has pictured Jesus as going it alone in proclaiming the good news of the kingdom. He seems to have no companions as He makes His way through the synagogues. If we had only the Gospel of Mark, the call of the first disciples would appear to be something "out of the blue" (Mark 1:16-20). But by reading the Gospels of Luke and John we realize that Jesus and the first disciples were rather well acquainted even before their call to follow. In the previous section we heard how Jesus had gone to the home of Simon and healed His mother-in-law. When now He makes use of Simon's boat, it does not seem at all strange. Simon was simply returning a favor. (PBC)

5:1 one occasion – This passage must be seen in view of 4:43, which immediately precedes it, i.e., that Jesus' teaching in the boat and the miraculous catch of fish are part of Jesus' necessity to "proclaim as Good News the kingdom of God, because for this purpose I was sent." Although Peter appeared briefly in connection with the healing of his mother-in-law, this is the first passage in Luke's gospel where Jesus interacts with his future disciples. Peter will now respond to Jesus' pattern of teaching and performing miracles and will enter into the kingdom of God and its preaching when Jesus calls him to be a "catcher of men alive." (CC)

Luke sets the stage well by introducing us to the participants (Jesus, the fishermen, and the crowds) and the place (a boat on the lake of Gennesaret). The setting is catechetical: the main action is the teaching and hearing of the Word of God through Jesus. Peter will be called in this passage to be a hearer of the Word—a disciple or catechumen—and to continuously hear the Word of God from Jesus. There is no time reference except the implicit reference to morning in Peter's description of their lack of success after having worked hard all night (5:5). Fishing at night in the darkness, the fishermen caught nothing. But night is over; the Dawn has appeared in Galilee (cf. Is 9:1–2). From this moment on Peter and the disciples will live in the light, where the "fishing" is good because they abide in the presence of Christ. (CC)

Lake of Gennesaret. Luke is the only one who calls it a lake. The other Gospel writers call it the Sea of Galilee, and John twice calls it the Sea of Tiberias (Jn 6:1; 21:1). (CSB)

Usually called the Sea of Galilee; also called the Sea of Tiberias. (TLSB)

παρὰ τὴν λίμνην Γεννησαρέτ—The lake Gennesaret is the Sea of Galilee. Luke's geography is very accurate, for Jesus moves easily from Capernaum to the shores of Galilee. (CC)

crowd was pressing in on him – It was impossible for Him to avoid the crowds that gathered whenever His presence was announced by some one that saw Him. Here a multitude pressed upon Him, whose eagerness for the Word of God is mentioned. (Kretzmann)

to hear – ἀκούειν τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ—In the early Christian church, a technical term for a catechumen was a “hearer of the Word.” Hippolytus' Apostolic Tradition from around A.D. 215 offers an example (G. J. Cuming, *Hippolytus: A Text for Students* [Bramcote, England: Grove, 1976] 17): “And when those who are to receive baptism are chosen, let their life be examined. ... Have they done every kind of good work? And when those who brought them bear witness to each: ‘He has’, let them hear the gospel.” One who “hears the gospel” (a technical term) was a catechumen, who, after three years of instruction, was enrolled in the final stage of catechesis before Baptism. (CC)

Certainly the highly structured catechetical regimen described by Hippolytus and other early church fathers was developed after Luke's time. However, Luke's gospel itself offers clues about the beginnings of such catechetical procedures and terminology. Those who were Jesus' original “hearers” or who were “hearing” or “listening to the word(s)” of Jesus could be called “hearers,” “learners,” “students,” “disciples,” or even “catechumens,” and the NT bears witness to the start of formal catechesis already in the NT era; see comments on κατηχήθης, “catechized,” in Lk 1:4. In fact, μαθητής, “disciple,” denotes one who regularly listens to, learns from, and follows a teacher or rabbi. “To hear,” ἀκούω, is used in the Sermon on the Plain and marks its catechetical nature (6:27, 47, 49). In other significant places “hearer(s)” of Jesus' words or those who come “to hear” may be those in the initial stage of becoming disciples or catechumens. (CC)

Luke contains nine references to “hearing” Jesus' “word(s)” (ἀκούω and λόγος): 5:1, 15; 6:47; 8:12, 13, 15, 21; 10:39; 11:28. Particularly in the Sermon on the Plain, Jesus will stress that it is not enough merely to “hear” his Word; one must hear and also “do” it (ποιέω, 6:47, 49; 8:21) or “keep” it (φυλάσσω, 11:28; also Jn 12:47). Cf. Mary “keeping” or “treasuring” words about Jesus (ῥήμα and compounds of τηρέω) in Lk 2:19, 51 and the Johannine theme of “keeping” Jesus' “Word” (τηρέω and λόγος in Jn 8:51, 52, 55; 14:23, 24; 15:20; 17:6). (CC)

An important part of the background of NT and early church language about “hearing” Jesus' Word is found in the Torah, and in particular in Deuteronomy, where the verb שָׁמַע occurs some ninety-two times, usually denoting the hearing of God's words by the Israelites. But the verb does not simply mean “to hear.” *Most of the time it means “to hear in faith,” and therefore “to believe and to put into practice.”* Typical is the thought of Deut 4:1: “And now, O Israel, *hear* the statutes and statements of justice that I am teaching you *to do so that you may live.*” As with Jesus in the NT, it is not the mere hearing of the Word that effects salvation, but *hearing in faith—faith that is created in the heart by that same Word of God, faith that is active in works, and faith by which one inherits the promises in the Word.* Noteworthy in this regard is Deut 6:4: “*Hear, O Israel, Yahweh your God, Yahweh is one,*” which really means, “*Believe, O Israel, that Yahweh your God is one.*” “To hear” means “to believe.” The Gospel import of “to hear” is reinforced by

Deut 11:13–15, 18–25, where as a result of hearing, the Israelites love Yahweh and receive the blessings of his grace. (CC pp. 203,204)

the word of God – τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ—The Word of God is a Lukan expression for the preaching of Jesus and the apostles, i.e., the Gospel. The genitive τοῦ θεοῦ is subjective, i.e., the Word is *from* God and is *God's* Word (rather than just being “about God”). (CC p 204)

The preaching of Jesus comes first; everything else that happens in the passage is the result of His word. This preaching takes place in a setting of water and boats and nets. The technical vocabulary of fishing is scattered throughout this periscope, suggesting that the hearer take seriously the image of fishing as a metaphor for the work of Jesus and His disciples. (CC p. 206)

5:2 washing their nets. After each period of fishing, the nets were washed, stretched and prepared for use again. (CSB)

Regular task for fishermen such as Peter, Andrew, James, and John. (TLSB)

The nets were usually washed after a catch of fish, so it is surprising that the disciples would be washing the nets if they had not caught any fish. “Net” is used four times here, and only in this pericope in Luke. It is the boundary between being loose in the water or being caught and in the boat. As one is brought from one status to another, i.e., from being loose to being caught, the transition is effected by a miracle that testifies to God’s presence. In this case, the miracle is that the nets that could find no fish now find an overabundance of fish *because of the word of Jesus*. The nets are being cleaned, even though they have not been dirtied by fish, so that they might be ready to serve as the vehicle for God’s miraculous work in his new creation. The nets are the means by which one is brought into the church. The nets are put into the water at Jesus’ word. Thus Luke configures his opening to the passage with references to the preaching of Jesus (5:1, 3). Entrance into the boat where Jesus is present must be through the nets, the preaching of the kingdom of God. The pericope is about “catching men alive”—through the ministry of the means of grace. This is what establishes the church. (CC p. 207)

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boats – The first word of this sort is “boats” (πλοῖα). Note the movement of Jesus with respect to the boats: Jesus sees the boats (5:2), goes down into a boat (5:3), and uses the boat for teaching (5:3). The boats receive the great catch of fish (5:7), and then are left behind when Peter, James, and John follow Jesus (5:11). Momentarily, the boat becomes the place where Christ proclaims the kingdom and where the miraculous results of his teaching are contained. Compare Noah, who was saved through a boat as a type of Holy Baptism (1 Pet 3:20–21). Because Christ is present in the boat, it becomes a symbol of the church, where Christ’s teaching and miracles take place and where believers are gathered. Luther sees it this way when he says: “It is our comfort, however,

that Christ, through our preaching, will lead his own into the boat.” The church also had this in mind when it named the part of the sanctuary called the “nave”—Latin for “boat” or “ship.” (CC)

Indeed, the pericope is moving toward Jesus’ commission to Peter to be a “catcher of men alive.” The miracle is about the church and how the church comes into existence through preaching. Here Luther captures the significance of all the imagery: the sea is the world, the fish are people, the net is the preaching of the Gospel, and the boat is the church. And so it is no coincidence that Luke reports that the disciples were washing their nets (ἐπλυνον τὰ δίκτυα). Why this small tidbit of information on the fishing practices of Galilean fishermen? (CC pp. 206,207)

The nave is main part of our church where the Word and Sacraments are shared and where Christ is present with his gifts. Nave means “boat” or “ship.” The sea is the world, the fish are the people, the net is the Gospel and the boat is the church. We are to throw the net out there as a type of life saver and help bring people into the boat/church.

5:3 which was Simon’s – The miracle itself is structured around the dialog between Simon Peter and Jesus. Peter had been introduced into the narrative at the healing of his mother-in-law (4:38) but was incidental to the story. In the miraculous catch of fish, Peter is a central figure (5:3, 4, 5, 8, 10). This is the story of his call by Jesus. It is not without significance that it is Peter’s boat into which Jesus enters in order to teach. Peter is from the beginning of the gospel first among the Twelve. (CC)

put out a little from the land. Allowed Jesus some freedom from the press of the crowd, which made Him easier to see and to hear. (TLSB)

sat down. The usual position for teaching. The boat provided an ideal arrangement, removed from the press of the crowd but near enough to be seen and heard. (CSB)

taught the people – ἐδίδασκεν—Jesus’ teaching on the boat continues his pattern of proclamation and miracles. This teaching must have had as significant an impact on Peter as the miracle. Luther rightly accents the impact of the sermon on Peter: “Peter is to become a different man; and a greater miracle is to be wrought in him than in the draught of fishes. The sermon which Christ had previously preached from the boat now first began to have its effect upon him” (*Sermons of Martin Luther*, ed. John N. Lenker, trans. J. Lenker et al., vol. 4 [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983] 156). (CC p. 204)

5:4 into the deep – Jesus asks Peter to do something that defies all human logic: after a long night of fishing without success to go back out into the deep and let down his nets to fish. In the OT, the depths of the sea have the connotations of chaos, evil and death. (CC p. 208)

5:5 master – This is title unique to Luke. It means “chief,” “commander.” An address of respect. Later, Peter will acclaim Jesus with more exalted titles, such as “Lord” (v. 8) and “the Christ of God” (9:20). (TLSB)

toiled all night – Night fishing often yields good results. On this night, however, they had no success. (TLSB)

He does not register an objection, but merely states as a fact that they have worked hard all night and have caught nothing. They had plied their trade at the time and under the conditions which experience had shown them to be the most favorable, at night, and on the benches of the lake not far from the shore. (Kretzmann)

because you say so – Peter moves into this dark unknown at the word of Jesus. His subsequent following of Jesus “on a path unknown is therefore a logical progression for one who had already ‘put out into the deep’ on the basis of a word only.” Peter has been struck by Jesus’ teaching from the boat about the kingdom and therefore lowers his nets at Jesus’ word. (CC p. 208)

5:6 *large number of fish* – The word of Jesus creates the great catch of fish. Contrary to Peter’s expectation, Jesus shows him that fish are in abundance – in places where one least expects. Here Jesus’ action as the Creator overcomes Peter’s doubt. As in the feeding of the five thousand, when the Creator comes to his creation to recreate, there is always abundance. The abundance of fish is a foretaste of the success of the Gospel mission. Even though the nets appear ready to break, they remain firm and accomplish the task of bringing the fish into the boat, as will the proclamation of the Gospel. (CC)

Likely the comb, or musht, fish, the only large fish in Galilee that moves in shoals. Some 30 varieties of fish now live in the lake. (TLSB)

5:7 *their partners*. Four of Jesus most important apostles were two pairs of brothers: Simon Peter and Andrew; and James and John (sons of Zebedee). They may have run a sizable fishing business. (TLSB)

Luther’s suggestion is provocative:

“This draught of fishes is so great that the one boat alone (hitherto representing the Church of the Jewish people) is not able to draw it up or large enough to contain it. Those in the boat must beckon to their partners in the other to come and help them. This other boat is the assembly and Church of the Gentiles which has been established and spread by the Apostles. Thus were the two boats filled with one and the same draught of fishes, that is, with one and the same sort of preaching, and a corresponding faith and confession.” (CC p. 208)

There is a pattern of mission suggested by this movement from one boat where Christ and Peter are to boats of other apostles (carrying out the same work). In the early church, Christian gathered in house churches. When a house church (fifty to a hundred people) reached full capacity and was overflowing, a group of the baptized split off from that church and formed another house church in another house (another boat). The foundation of this house would be those who had been hearers of the Word and had been brought across the boundary between paganism and Christianity through the net of preaching, catechesis, and Baptism. These were always Eucharistic communities of the baptized, who would then go out fishing for those who were lost in the deep and needed to be brought over that same boundary in the same net. (CC pp. 208-209)

5:8 *Simon Peter* – Σίμων Πέτρος—By giving Peter’s two names here in the context of his call by Jesus, the evangelist follows Matthew (4:18) and emphasizes Peter’s place of leadership among the twelve apostles. He is “the rock.” (CC)

depart from me. The nearer one comes to God, the more he feels his own sinfulness and unworthiness—as did Abraham (Ge 18:27), Job (42:6) and Isaiah (6:5). (CSB)

Peter shrinks back in holy fear. God's purity and power highlights Peter's weakness and sin. (TLSB)

As in the infancy narrative, where the presence of God moves from the temple to the person of Jesus, the evangelist is suggesting to the hearer that there is a shift here in the location of the presence of God. He is now in the boat! Peter wants Jesus to leave because Peter is a sinner. Whole drawn to Jesus through the miracle, Peter also wants Jesus to depart from him, because he knows he is unworthy to be in Jesus' presence. Awe has gripped Peter – indeed everyone who saw the great catch. (James and John are named in particular.) (CC p. 209)

5:10 *do not be afraid* – With Jesus at our side there is nothing to fear when we go about doing his work. (CSB)

Jesus' response is His word of absolution to Peter. The miracle of bringing fish into the boat is the miracle of making the unworthy sinner fit to stay in the presence of the holy God. It is the miracle of the forgiveness of sins (cf. Isaiah's similar reaction and the absolution that enabled him to serve as a prophet [Is 6:1-8]). The miracle of forgiveness will be celebrated in the next three passages of this section. (CC p. 209)

catching men – Jesus says, "From now on you will be catching men alive."

Not only does Christ give comfort to poor, terror-stricken Peter by the kindly words in which he declares and offers to him his grace and absolution, but he goes on to strengthen this comfort by the great promise that he will give him something far beyond anything he has hitherto received from him. ... "From henceforth," Christ says, "thou shalt catch men." That Peter is not to be alarmed on account of his unworthiness and sins is, in itself, an abundant comfort and grace. However, he is not only to have the forgiveness of his sins, but is also to know that God intends to accomplish still greater things through him by making him a help and comfort to others.

In Peter's call there is both absolution and a commission to extend that absolution to others (see comments at 22:28–30). (CC)

Only Luke uses ζῶντέω, which means "to capture alive" (from ἄγρῳ "to catch" and ζῶς "alive"). The point of comparison is in the transition from one status to another, from swimming loose in the deep to being caught and in the boat with Jesus. To catch fish, one needs a net and a boat; to catch people alive one needs absolution from Jesus and the commission to absolve others. To capture people alive is to declare to them the kingdom of God in Jesus (4:43) and bring them into that kingdom through catechesis, Baptism, and Eucharist. Peter's commission to catch people alive is to go out and do what Jesus has just done to him, i.e., to preach the kingdom and absolve. This is how the church is created and formed and preserved. (CC pp. 209 – 210)

Lit, "become a fisher of men." Peter would henceforth gather mortal men into everlasting life rather than hunt and kill fish. (TLSB)

5:11 *left everything and followed him*. This was not the first time these men had been with Jesus (see Jn 1:40–42; 2:1–2). Their periodic and loose association now became a closely knit fellowship as they followed the Master. The scene is the same as Mt 4:18–22 and Mk 1:16–20, but the accounts relate events from different hours of the morning. (CSB)

Fishing often brought an above average income, so these disciples left behind considerable assets. (TLSB)

ἀφέντες πάντα ἠκολούθησαν αὐτῷ—The plural ἀφέντες suggests that Peter, James, and John are included in this act of discipleship. To leave everything and follow Jesus is the sign of discipleship. Levi the tax collector will do the same thing as a sign that he is going to follow Jesus as a disciple (5:28). (CC p. 205)

Luke concludes the call of Peter by showing that Jesus' absolution was received in faith, for Peter and some of the others perform their first act of discipleship. Because Jesus is moving on, the church goes with him, and these newly called disciples desire to be with Jesus. The focus of Luke's ecclesiology is now clearly on Jesus, the Anointed One; the preaching of the Gospel of the kingdom; and Peter, the first disciple called and the first among the Twelve. (CC p. 210)

5:1–11 A miraculous catch of fish shows the disciples that Jesus is more than a great teacher—God is working mightily through Him. Like the disciples, the mundane struggle for daily bread, and the sin and doubt it fosters, may make you feel distant from God. But He is ever near and also ever prepared to forgive your sins. • Stay with me, Lord, for I am a sinful person. Grant me repentance and a new life in service to You. Amen. (TLSB)

The Man With Leprosy

12 While he was in one of the cities, there came a man full of leprosy. And when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and begged him, “Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.” 13 And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, “I will; be clean.” And immediately the leprosy left him. 14 And he charged him to tell no one, but “go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as Moses commanded, for a proof to them.” 15 But now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities. 16 But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray.

5:12–16 The healing of the man with leprosy is described in all three of the Synoptic Gospels, but the setting is different in each. In Matthew (8:1–4) it is part of a collection of miracles; in Mark (1:40–45) and Luke it is probably one incident that occurred on the first tour of Galilee. (CSB)

5:12 while Jesus was in one of the cities – The introductory time and place reference “while he was in one of the cities” (5:12) provides a link to Jesus' declaration that “also to other cities it is necessary that I proclaim as Good News the kingdom of God, because for this purpose I was sent” (4:43). (CC)

full of leprosy. Luke alone notes the extent of his disease. The Greek term was used in medical literature, though not concerning leprosy. (CSB)

As most diseases, leprosy affected people both physically and spiritually (cf Lv 13:1–8). (TLSB)

ἀνὴρ πλήρης λέπρας—This is the first of two times Jesus encounters a leper(s) in Luke's gospel (see 17:12–19). Leprosy is a skin disease that was considered paradigmatic of uncleanness, and Jesus' contact with a leper would be a serious violation of Israel's purity code in Leviticus 12–26. (CC)

fell on his face – πεσὼν ἐπὶ πρόσωπον ἐδεήθη αὐτοῦ—As Peter fell down (5:8), the paralytic falls on his face as a sign of reverence for one who has the authority and power of the Messiah. This provides a literary link between this passage and the preceding one. The leper in Luke's second healing account also falls on his face before Jesus (17:16). (CC)

make me clean – καθάρισαι—Cleanliness from an unclean disease is the central point of this passage, and Luke accents this by repeating καθαρίζω and its derivatives three times (5:12, 13, 14). With two exceptions (2:22; 11:39), words for cleansing are used in Luke in connection with leprosy. (CC)

This man does not doubt Jesus' ability to heal. Rather, he expresses his sense of unworthiness. (TLSB)

5:13 *stretched...touched* – The healing of the leper is part of his preaching of the kingdom of God. The core of the pericope highlights Jesus' cleansing of the leper. Jesus *conforms* to the Levitical code (Leviticus 12–26) by sending the leper to show himself to the priest and make an offering as commanded in Lev 14:1–32. However, Jesus also *breaks* with Israel's purity code because he touches the leper, and instead of Jesus becoming unclean, Jesus himself remains clean and cleanses the leper too. (CC)

The significance of Jesus' action is more striking when considered in light of OT theology. The purpose of the OT laws regarding holy, clean, and unclean was to enable God in his grace to dwell in the midst of his people. Since God is holy, and fallen humanity is infected with sin, God's presence posed the threat of punishment. Indeed, contact with God resulted in swift and severe judgment when the laws of holiness were violated. But the laws provided a sacrificial, atoning means through which God's people might be deemed clean in God's sight, so that God's presence would be in terms of Gospel instead of Law and condemnation. (CC)

God in his holiness dwelt “incarnationally” in the tabernacle and the later temple. God's people, deemed clean through sacrificial atonement, dwelt around God. That which was clean was in conformity with God's design, unlike the unclean. The clean formed a kind of buffer zone between the holy and the unclean. But just being clean did not prepare one for direct contact with God. Only those persons and things that were consecrated to be holy could enter God's presence in the tabernacle and temple, minister before him, and touch the sacred furnishings. That is why, for example, God struck down Uzzah, who touched the ark (2 Sam 6:6–7; see Num 4:15). Cf. also Nadab and Abihu, who were holy, but who abused their office by changing the liturgy contrary to God's instructions (Leviticus 10). Contrast the death of Uzzah with the blessings that came to Obed-Edom through the presence of the very same ark when God's holiness was respected (2 Sam 6:10–12). (CC)

Lev 13:45–46 commands that a leprous person must be quarantined: he must live alone outside the camp and warn others to keep away so that he will not have any contact with people who are clean, lest he contaminate them as well. Unclean persons, particularly lepers, were especially forbidden to approach the tabernacle and temple. Only after lepers were healed were they permitted to draw near God's Holy Place. (CC)

Jesus departs radically from the OT holiness code when he, the new temple, the new location of the incarnational presence of God, deliberately approaches an unclean person and touches him. An unclean person was to keep away from God, but God in Christ sought out such a person. Instead of the unclean person being struck down or consumed by fire, Jesus cleanses him. In place of deadly Law (cf. Ex 19:10–13, 20–24), the holiness of God in Christ has a Gospel effect

as Jesus brings healing and salvation. Jesus both fulfills the OT (“show yourself to the priest and make an offering ... just as Moses commanded” [5:14]) and supersedes it (“he touched him, saying, ‘... be cleansed’ ” [5:13]). As Jesus redefines the purposes of the OT laws about uncleanness and God’s holiness in a Gospel manner, this will begin to create controversies with the Jewish religious authorities, as illustrated in the next passage, the healing of the paralytic. (CC)

In Lk 17:12–19, Jesus will heal ten lepers, but only one will return to give thanks. Since foreigners (unless incorporated into Israel) were perpetually unclean, Jesus’ healing of the *Samaritan* is even more startling. (CC)

This incident serves as an illustration of the mission of Peter and the early church to “cleanse” Jews through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus’ abrogation of the OT purity laws will also lead to Peter’s instrumental role in launching the Gentile mission with Cornelius, a mission that comes only after Peter is catechized by revelation as to Jesus’ fulfillment of the OT laws of clean and unclean and as to Christian table fellowship (Acts 10–11). This miracle, then, provides a wonderful opportunity to catechize both Jews and Gentiles about the fulfillment in Christ of the OT, particularly the aspects of purity, holiness, and sacrifice. (CC)

Jesus’ objective, in dealing with the people of Israel and their religious authorities, was to affirm the written code of the Law (carefully distinguished from the oral traditions added by the Pharisees) and to demonstrate that it points to—and is now fulfilled in—himself. Luke upholds and demonstrates the truth of Jesus’ words in Mt 5:17–18: “Think not that I have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.” Jesus will engage the Jewish religious authorities in a discussion of the Law in a variety of situations. As he moves back to the OT, his hermeneutic will be Christological. Luke uses the cleansing of a leper to establish the foundation for Jesus’ teaching with the Pharisees, in anticipation of Jesus’ first controversy with the Pharisees in the healing of the paralytic in the next passage. (CC)

The account of the cleansing of the leper raises several issues for the hearer. First, it is an announcement that Jesus is the Messiah, for the cleansing of lepers is a sign that the messianic era of salvation is now present. Jesus himself will formally announce this when John the Baptist and his followers come asking Jesus if he is “the Coming One,” and Jesus responds with the prophecy from Isaiah (29, 35, 42, 26, 61) that “lepers are cleansed” (Lk 7:22). (CC)

Second, the cleansing takes place because Jesus, God’s holiness enfleshed, reaches out and touches something unclean and declares it clean. This is a pure act of God’s grace and compassion upon one who is incapable of effecting his own healing. Jesus crosses a boundary that only God may cross without fear of contamination. In the case of ordinary people, the *uncleanness* spreads through touching. Jesus’ holy presence overcomes all unholiness and uncleanness. Wherever Jesus is, there is cleansing. By stretching out his hand and touching the leper, Jesus causes a great scandal—and cleanses the leper. (CC)

Third, by performing this healing, Jesus shows that the OT code of holiness points to him. His life and death fulfill it and abrogate it. But that abrogation is not complete until his sacrificial death. Until then, there is still a need for Israel to conform to the purity laws of the OT, which require the newly cleansed leper to show himself to the priest and make an offering on behalf of the cleansing. Jesus knows the timetable and the “hour” (22:14). Therefore, he instructs the leper to tell no one, but to go and make the offering. (CC)

Fourth, this miracle, in which the *body* of the leper is cleansed, entails profound *spiritual* ramifications. By sending the leper to the priest, Jesus sends the hearer back to the OT purity laws and regulations in Leviticus (14:1–32). (The same instructions will be given to the ten lepers in Luke 17.) The offerings commanded in Leviticus were both guilt and sin offerings. They showed the connection between the body and the soul. Jesus was not a dualist (or gnostic). The OT Levitical codes were holistic:

Lev. 11–16 contains the “Law of Purity,” the complex laws governing “cleanness” and “uncleanness,” purification from “defilement,” or the like. We use quotes because there is no adequate translation of the Hebrew *tamé*. The concept is closely related to “holiness,” which we still use, but tend to misconstrue as well by spiritualizing [cf. footnote]. *The Biblical concepts are at once physical or material and spiritual, at once envisioning a sort of force or power as well as the resultant state, referring both to underlying incompleteness and imperfection (“original sin”) as well as to the “actual sin” resulting from it.* (CC)

The salvation Jesus works in fulfillment of the OT is similarly *holistic*. (CC)

Fifth, if the hearer returns to Leviticus 14, he will find the instructions concerning leprosy to include a number of sacrificial offerings. Complementing the cleansing of the body is the cleansing of the soul. The two most significant offerings to accomplish this spiritual aspect of the cleansing are the guilt and sin offerings, both of which involve the priest making atonement for the leper with blood before the Lord. In the guilt offering, a male lamb is killed in “the Holy Place,” and its blood spread on various extremities of the leper, after which “the priest shall make atonement for him before Yahweh” (Lev 14:10–18). After the guilt offering,

the priest shall offer the sin offering, to make atonement for him who is to be cleansed from his uncleanness. And afterward he shall kill the burnt offering. And the priest shall offer the burnt offering and the cereal offering on the altar. Thus the priest shall make atonement for him, and he shall be clean. (CC)

Luke’s Jewish-Christian hearers would understand that these sacrificial offerings looked forward to the sacrifice of the atonement of the Messiah and were thus “sacramental” insofar as these offerings were “God-ordained means of grace for ‘expiating’ sin and ‘propitiating’ His righteous wrath.” But these hearers would be struck *already at this early point in the gospel* by two things. First, that Jesus affirms the unity of body and soul by cleansing the leper’s body and then sending him to the priest for the cleansing of his soul through blood sacrifices, conforming to the OT sacrificial laws. But second (and even more significant in light of Jesus’ atonement and the ongoing presence of the sacrificed Christ in the Eucharist), the Christian hearer would see the irony of this scene. Jesus is the one who would make atonement and sacrifice for sin. He is *the Sacrament, to whom all OT sacrifices point*. He heals a leper by the touch of his hand and the pronouncement of his absolving word: “Be cleansed.” Then he sends this leper to a priest for sacrifices that look forward to Jesus’ own sacrifice to end all sacrifices. The witness (εἰς μαρτύριον) of the leper’s offering is to the presence of God’s atoning work in Jesus. In the moment when Jesus and this leper meet, the sacrificial system still functions as a testimony to the sacrifice *yet to happen* on Calvary. (CC)

Since the underlying problem is simply sin in its deepest dimensions, both objective and subjective, both ethical and ritual, the “purification” must ultimately be related again to the covenant, that is to God’s declaratory verdict of “justified.” In this connection we find that verdict reflected in the “declaratory formulae” of the priests, pronouncing one clean. (A

similar usage appears in connection with sacrifice, which the priest declares acceptable to God or meeting with His favor.) Only when sin has been comprehensively removed in the cross of the new covenant will it be possible to lift these cumbersome restrictions (Acts 10, etc.). (CC)

Therefore, this leper *must* be sent to the priests, for the *testimony*. (CC)

There is one final observation that must be made that strengthens the significance of the presence of the atonement in the cleansing of the leper. In the sin offering offered for a leper, the carcass of the bull must be burned “outside the camp” (Lev 4:11–12). Very early in the catechetical tradition of the church, this action was tied to the sanctifying blood of Jesus shed on the cross and the ongoing eucharistic repasts of the church where this blood continues to sanctify and is accompanied by Christian sacrifices:

We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. Therefore, let us go forth to him outside the camp, bearing abuse for him. For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come. Through him, then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise [ἀναφέρωμεν θυσίαν αἰνέσεως] to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God (Heb 13:10–16). (CC)

Noteworthy detail, because Jewish purity laws held that this contact would defile Jesus. Remarkably, the exchange runs in the other direction. Jesus does not become defiled, but the unclean man is made whole and pure. Cf Lv 5:3; 13. (TLSB)

5:14 *tell no one* Jesus sought to avoid misunderstandings about His identity and mission. The time for His exaltation had not yet come. Cf 9:7–9. (TLSB)

but go, show yourself to the priest. By this command Jesus urged the man to keep the law, to provide further proof for the actual healing, to testify to the authorities concerning his ministry and to supply ritual certification of cleansing so the man could be reinstated into society. (CSB)

5:15 *report...went abroad* – The conclusion of this pericope (Lk 5:15–16) notes the spread of Jesus’ fame and the continual gathering of crowds. Jesus’ response is regularly to retreat from the cities into the desert to pray. Jesus is seen in prayer often, especially before important events in his life, e.g., at his baptism (3:21), the calling of the Twelve (6:12), the first passion prediction (9:18), and his transfiguration (9:28). (CC)

5:16 *withdrew...pray* – Jesus prays now, as the crowds grow and controversies loom. Opposition against him will increase and harden, for he is a prophet and will be rejected. (CC)

It was His custom to do this, as the original implies, which might be rendered, He was in the habit of withdrawing. (Concordia Bible – With Notes)

5:12–16 Jesus cleanses a leper by touching him and sends him to fulfill the Law of Moses. He still touches lives today and has mercy according to His good and gracious will. Bring your requests to Jesus, and trust in His good purposes for you. Even now, your Savior is interceding

for you in heaven. • Cleanse me, dearest Jesus, and make Your will known in my life, that I may fulfill Your Word and fill the world with the report of Your goodness. Amen. (TLSB)

Jesus Heals a Paralytic

17 On one of those days, as he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was with him to heal. 18 And behold, some men were bringing on a bed a man who was paralyzed, and they were seeking to bring him in and lay him before Jesus, 19 but finding no way to bring him in, because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the midst before Jesus. 20 And when he saw their faith, he said, “Man, your sins are forgiven you.” 21 And the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, saying, “Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?” 22 When Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answered them, “Why do you question in your hearts? 23 Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Rise and walk’? 24 But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the man who was paralyzed—“I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go home.” 25 And immediately he rose up before them and picked up what he had been lying on and went home, glorifying God. 26 And amazement seized them all, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, “We have seen extraordinary things today.”

Luke’s framework very carefully distinguishes between the participants in this pericope. By introducing Jesus and the Pharisees and teachers of the law first, he shows that the *controversy* between them over Jesus’ ability to forgive sins will *take the central place in this passage* (5:17). In the way Luke introduces these participants, he gives a clue as to how to interpret the controversy. Luke calls to mind Jesus’ ministry of teaching and healing. Continuing the normal pattern of his ministry, Jesus teaches in the synagogues, and the people are continuing to be amazed at the authority of his teaching (4:32, 36). Jesus’ ability to heal the paralytic stems from the same divine authority as his teaching, and Jesus’ healing is just as natural a part of his ministry as his teaching. (CC)

5:17 Pharisees and teachers of the law. Opposition was rising in Galilee from these religious leaders. (CSB)

Members of this party (and their expert interpreters of the Law) appear for the first time in Lk. (TLSB)

Pharisees. Mentioned here for the first time in Luke. Their name meaning “separated ones,” they numbered about 6,000 and were spread over the whole of Palestine. They were teachers in the synagogues, religious examples in the eyes of the people and self-appointed guardians of the law and its proper observance. They considered the interpretations and regulations handed down by tradition to be virtually as authoritative as Scripture (Mk 7:8–13). Already Jesus had run counter to the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem (Jn 5:16–18). Now they came to a home in Capernaum (Mk 2:1–6) to hear and watch him. (CSB)

This is the first appearance in Luke of the Pharisees, and they are the first human participants who are hostile to Jesus. They are described as sitting, which suggests the posture of those who are about to “sit” in judgment over Jesus. Immediately the hearer detects their absolute air of authority. They have also come from all over—Galilee, Judea, and even Jerusalem. This reminds the hearer that Jesus’ destiny in Jerusalem will be a direct result of the animosity his opponents

have for his teaching and miracles, as the chief priests and crowds accuse him during Pilate's first trial: "He incites the people, teaching throughout all Judea, and having begun from Galilee until here" (23:5). Luke concludes this brief introduction by saying that God's power was with Jesus to heal. The hearer knows that the following incident will illustrate that this is power to heal bodies and to forgive sins. (CC)

teachers of the law. "Scribes," who studied, interpreted and taught the law (both written and oral). The majority of these teachers belonged to the party of the Pharisees. (CSB)

the power of the Lord was with Him to heal. Not temporary or momentary power but intrinsic to Jesus' person. (TLSB)

5:19 tiles. Probably ceiling tiles. (CSB)

Israelite homes typically had branches and mud laid across roof beams. The word denotes a more sophisticated roof tile, typical of Roman construction. (TLSB)

The introductory part of a second frame introduces the paralytic and the participants in the miracle (5:18–19). A number of things about these brief verses strike the hearer. There is a great crowd in the house where Jesus is teaching. (Although the text does not say, the setting may be a Sabbath evening Seder, where Jesus teaches at the table in preparation for his teaching at the synagogue the next morning.) The condition of the paralytic is humanly hopeless. Yet the paralytic's friends have faith in the power of Jesus to heal (5:17). When they carry him to the roof, remove the roof, and let him down before Jesus, it shows their seriousness and persistence. But it also highlights what is probably the most significant part of this introduction: the goal of the friends is to place the paralytic *in the presence of Jesus*. Luke very subtly shows this by two references, one in each verse: they were seeking to lay the paralytic *before him* (ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ), and they let him down through the tiles *in front of Jesus* (ἐμπροσθεν τοῦ Ἰησοῦ). With these two expressions, Luke emphasizes the importance of Jesus' presence for salvation. Salvation will come in the form of the healing and the absolving of sins. It is important to note that the faith of the paralytic's friends does not produce the miracle but is the reason why the paralytic is present before Jesus. The miracle and the absolution are not caused by their faith. Saving faith simply embraces the objective presence of the gracious God in Christ. (CC)

bed. Stretcherlike mat on which the paralytic was carried. (TLSB)

5:20 Saw their faith – τὴν πίστιν αὐτῶν—The plural αὐτῶν instead of the singular αὐτοῦ clearly includes the faith of those who brought the paralytic, not just the faith of the paralytic himself. This is the first time πίστις has occurred in Luke's gospel, even though the verb πιστεύω occurs in the infancy narrative with reference to Zechariah's lack of faith (1:20) and Mary's belief in the words spoken to her by the Lord (1:45). It can mean the men's loyalty (to their paralyzed friend) but must necessarily extend also to trust that Jesus can help. Although not mentioned again in this passage, the faith of the paralytic's friends looms as a significant statement by the evangelist that faith in Jesus embraces his ability to heal both body and soul. πίστις also occurs at 7:9, 50; 8:25, 48; 17:5, 6, 19; 18:8, 42; 22:32; πιστεύω at 8:12, 13, 50; 16:11; 20:5; 22:67; 24:25, and πιστός at 12:42; 16:10, 11; 16:12; 19:17. (CC)

sins are forgiven – ἀφέωνταί σοι αἱ ἁμαρτίαι σου—The use of ἀφέωνται does not state who actually forgives the sins of the paralytic but implies that it is God, i.e., your sins have been forgiven you (by God). The rest of the narrative will reveal that Jesus is the one who forgives the paralytic's sins, even though in this passage he never says, "I forgive you your sins" (cf. 7:48).

By using the theological passive, Luke is implicitly stating that Jesus is God, who forgives sins, anticipating Jesus' own words that as the Son of Man he has authority to do this. (CC)

The core of the story comes now, with the miracle and the controversy with the Pharisees. The frame for this central section of the story is the (two-part) miracle itself. The first miracle is the forgiveness of sins (5:20). Seeing their faith, Jesus pronounces absolution on the paralytic as he did on Peter (5:10) and the leper (5:13). Now it is an explicit declaration of forgiveness: "Man, your sins have been forgiven you" (5:20). By placing the miracle of forgiveness first, Jesus shows that forgiveness will take precedence in the new era of salvation, and the means by which forgiveness is offered in the church will be *the* miracles of the new era of salvation: preaching, catechesis, Baptism, and Eucharist. Miracles of physical healing will taper off in the NT era, but healing will be ongoing in the church age through the bestowal of forgiveness in preaching and in the sacraments, and these means of grace will continue until the resurrection of the body from the dead. (CC)

5:21 *this fellow ... speaks blasphemy.* The Pharisees considered blasphemy to be the most serious sin a man could commit. (CSB)

λαλεῖ βλασφημίας—λαλέω is often somewhat formal in Luke, hence "proclaims blasphemies." This is the only place the noun βλασφημία is used in Luke and the only time in Luke that Jesus is accused of blasphemy by any religious authority. The verb βλασφημέω occurs at 12:10, concerning blaspheming against the Holy Spirit; in 22:65, when Jesus is blasphemed against by the men holding him in custody; and in 23:39, where one of the criminals blasphemes Jesus by saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us." (CC)

5:24 *pick up your bed and go home* – The second miracle is found at the end of the central section, when Jesus says to the paralytic, "To you I say, rise up and take your pallet and go to your home" (5:24b). What alerts the hearer to this frame is a clumsy parenthetical phrase that is inserted in Jesus' response to the Pharisees: "He said to the paralyzed man" (εἶπεν τῷ παραλελυμένῳ). This forces us to separate the controversy from the miracle. Thereby it not only provides the frame of the miracle but shows how the controversy is resolved. The Son of Man does have authority to forgive sins, and he demonstrates this by healing the paralytic. At the same time, the frame places the forgiveness of sins on the same level as the healing of the paralytic. As Jesus showed in the cleansing of the leper, he is not a dualist who would deal with body and soul separately; rather he approaches humanity holistically. (CC)

Son of Man SON OF MAN – ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου—This is the first use of "Son of Man" in Luke's gospel. It is a title for Jesus that is used in all Lukan passion predictions (9:22; 9:44; 18:31), in the context of the Last Supper referring to the passion (22:22, 48), and in one passion statement in Luke's resurrection narrative (24:7). The tendency for Luke's literary composition is to use "Son of Man" within his passion material. But it is also used in other contexts. L. T. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 94, offers a helpful summary of Luke's use of this title, which, as he notes, only occurs on the lips of Jesus: "It ['Son of Man'] is used in three contexts: Jesus' present ministry (5:24; 6:5; 7:34; 9:56 [variant reading], 58; 19:10), the suffering of the Messiah (9:22, 26, 44; 18:31; 22:22, 48; 24:7), and the future role of judging (11:30; 12:8, 10, 40; 17:22, 24, 26, 30; 18:8; 21:27, 36; 22:69)." (CC)

that you may know. Jesus' power to heal was a visible affirmation of his power to forgive sins. (CSB)

Jesus' healing of this man's paralysis reveals not only His power over the physical but also His authority in the spiritual realm. Without this physical healing, Jesus' claim to forgive would be less persuasive (TLSB)

With this frame of miracles, the core controversy might seem anticlimactic. But it is here that Jesus gives theological meaning to his miracles of healing and forgiveness. The controversy begins with the scribes and Pharisees discussing (διαλογίζεσθαι) whether Jesus' absolution is blasphemy. In the course of their conversation, they make this remarkable statement: only God can forgive sins. At this point, the hearer might muse that "they know not what they say." But perhaps they do. Certainly the hearer knows that when Jesus used the theological passive, "your sins have been forgiven you [by God]," (5:23) and referred to himself as "the Son of Man" (5:24), he was making a (thinly veiled) claim to be God. That is what the Pharisees fear, what causes them such consternation, and what leads them to charge Jesus with blasphemy. This charge will linger until these envoys from Jerusalem return to their city and accuse Jesus for the final time during his passion (see the excursus "The Opponents of Jesus in Luke"). (CC)

Jesus' response to Pharisees begins with Luke telling us that Jesus perceives their thoughts (διαλογισμούς). This demonstrates Jesus' omniscience, as the words "*in your hearts*" show. The prophecy of Simeon that Jesus' preaching will pierce Israel's soul "in order that the thoughts out of many hearts [ἐκ πολλῶν καρδιῶν διαλογισμοί] may be revealed" is now coming true (see commentary on 2:35). The first in Israel to be pierced are the scribes and Pharisees, and they are pierced over Jesus' ability to forgive sins. Jesus' counter-question is quite logical:

By healing a paralysed man—an event eloquent in itself of the saving power demonstrated by Jesus—Jesus claims corroboration for his authority to forgive sins, since performance of the visible act of healing should have given at least some degree of proof that he possessed authority for the spiritual, and hence invisible and unprovable, act of forgiveness. ...

Strictly speaking, neither act [declaring forgiveness or healing the paralytic] is easier than the other, since both require divine power, but the latter [healing the paralytic] could be regarded as more difficult in the sense that while anybody could declare sin to be forgiven without having to submit his act to some kind of proof it is impossible to claim to heal a person without producing tangible evidence. (CC)

The main point Jesus makes in his comparison of the healing of the paralytic to the forgiving of his sins is to declare that he, the Son of Man, has authority *on earth* to forgive sins. The hearer knows that this self-assertion of Jesus about himself is the culmination of a process that goes back to his first sermon in Nazareth and the miracles he performed in Capernaum after that sermon. The essence of Jesus' messianic ministry (as announced in Nazareth on the basis of Isaiah 61 and 58) is release (ἄφεσις) from bondage. This bondage manifests itself in demon possession, sickness, sin, and death. Jesus manifests release from bondage by casting out demons (4:35), healing the sick (4:39), forgiving sin (5:20), and raising the dead (7:11–17). *For Jesus physical and spiritual brokenness are part of the same problem. They are two sides of the same coin, so Jesus treats them in the same way. As the Creator come to his creation as a creature, Jesus is present to free that creation from all its bondage.* (CC)

5:25 glorifying God – he paralytic, who was introduced in 5:18–19 as a cripple, now rises before the crowd, takes up his bed, and departs to his own home as a healed person. This inner frame concludes with the paralytic glorifying God, a true response of worship for the gifts of forgiveness and healing he has received from the Lord. (CC)

5:26 *filled with awe* – Luke says that amazement seized *all* (ἅπαντας), but that most likely means the crowd, not necessarily the Pharisees and scribes. No response from them is reported. The sword of Jesus’ preaching is passing through their souls, revealing their thoughts, causing some to fall and others to be resurrected (see comments on 2:34). But the crowds acknowledge that they are in the presence of God: they are utterly astonished, they glorify God, and they are filled with fear, saying, “We have seen paradoxical things today” (5:26). Today, in Jesus, God’s great incongruities are being worked out as God incarnate forgives and heals. Paradoxical wonders will continue when sinless Jesus next eats with Levi, a tax collector and sinner. (CC)

extraordinary things – παράδοξα—This can mean “strange” (KJV and RSV) or “remarkable” (NIV) things. (This is the only place this word occurs in the NT.) “Paradoxical” captures more fully the confused state of the crowds. Jesus’ miracle and forgiving of sins is certainly strange, but even more it is a paradox. How can this man from Nazareth do the things of God, and why does he not distinguish between the man’s physical ailments and his spiritual ones? This is part of Luke’s language of reversal and part of his “theology of the cross.” (CC)

5:17–26 Jesus asserts His authority to forgive sins by healing a paralyzed man. Though Jesus could easily say, “Your sins are forgiven you,” the price of that forgiveness cost Him His life. He bore the cross and your sins willingly, and He will also bear with you in all infirmities. • Grant me firm faith, O Lord, that I may walk in Your ways. Amen. (TLSB)

The Calling of Levi

27 After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth. And he said to him, “Follow me.” 28 And leaving everything, he rose and followed him. 29 And Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them. 30 And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” 31 And Jesus answered them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. 32 I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.”

After the healing of the paralytic Jesus left the house and went out to the seashore. On His way, which probably led along the great caravan road toward Damascus, He passed by the booth of a publican, a tax-collector or customs-inspector, by the name of Levi. Not by accident, but by design and with full intention, did the eyes of Jesus rest upon the man busy with his reports and the other business of his calling. Cf. Matt. 9, 9. (Kretzmann)

5:27 *a tax collector*. The tax-gatherers, the Gentiles and the sinners like Mary Magdalene, who could purchase a costly ointment for Jesus, were not economically poor. And yet they were poor in the sense that they recognized their poverty before God; they were *receptive* of His Messiah, of His salvation, of the forgiveness of their sins. And for all these divine benefits repayment was impossible. (CC)

In Luke’s theology, the poor were all those whom the religious leaders of Israel at the time of Christ considered, for one reason or another, as hopelessly excluded from the kingdom of God. They were the marginal men living on the fringes of Jewish society precisely because they deviated from the religious ideals of the Pharisees. Luke shows that social and economic poverty actually fostered the receptivity requisite for the acceptance of the Messiah. (CC)

For the religious establishment, the question of who was and who was not a “sinner” was the deciding factor in determining who was worthy of table fellowship. Ethnic purity, attested by genealogical evidence, was one important element in this.

There were many categories of people in Jewish society who deliberately, by nature, or through ignorance did not conform to the ideal of the law. In addition to Jews of mixed or illegitimate origin, these included the “sinners,” the members of despised trades such as tax collectors, herdsman, peddlers, or tanners, the physically deformed, the *am ha-arez* or mass of the population, Samaritans, and, to a certain extent, women. (CC)

Sinners were comparable to gentiles in their lack of observance of the law, as Paul suggests when he speaks of “we ... who are Jews by birth, not Gentile sinners” (Galatians 2:14). (CC)

In such a society, Jesus eats with “a great crowd of tax collectors and others who were reclining at table with them” (5:29). Controversy with the religious establishment was inevitable. (CC)

tax booth. The place where customs were collected. (CSB)

5:28 *leaving everything...followed him.* Since Jesus had been ministering in Capernaum for some time, Levi probably had known him previously. (CSB)

Again emphasizes that Jesus’ disciples left everything to follow Him. Because Levi walked away from a lucrative customs contract, his response to Jesus was esp costly (cf 19:1–10). (TLSB)

5:29–31 Levi’s banquet gives Jesus an opportunity to show His solidarity with sinners and emphasize that His mission was to call sinners to repentance (cf 19:10). This willingness to have fellowship with those considered sinners had a cost, however (cf 15:1–2). (TLSB)

5:29 *a great feast.* When Levi began to follow Jesus, he did not do it secretly. (CSB)

In the thankfulness of his heart Levi now made a feast for the Lord. It was a great feast, and he had it prepared in his own house. (Kretzmann)

reclining at table with them – κατακείμενοι—Luke has a broad vocabulary to describe reclining at the table, the normal posture for festive dining, and his use of it here indicates that this is an important feast. His other words are κατακλίνω (7:36; 9:14, 15; 14:8; 24:30), ἀνακλίνω (12:37; 13:29), and ἀναπίπτω (11:37; 14:10; 17:7). (CC)

5:30 *Pharisees ... grumbled.* They probably stood outside and registered their complaints from a distance. (CSB)

The guests, outside of Jesus and His disciples, were Levi’s former companions, a multitude of publicans and others, the majority such as were regarded with anything but favor by the proud and self-righteous Pharisees; they were mostly such as had been put out of the synagogue, with whom the average strict Jew would have no dealings. But here they were at the feast, reclining on the sofas about the tables. And many of them may have even then known and loved the Savior of sinners, being thankful to Levi for giving them the chance to see and hear more of the Lord. The fact that Jesus accepted an invitation into such a mixed assembly again offended the scribes and Pharisees of the Jews. The contrast between the teachings and methods of Jesus and those of the Jewish Church leaders was becoming more and more evident. The latter expressed their disapproval of the whole affair in no uncertain terms by remarking to the disciples of Jesus,

probably with the intention of alienating them from the Master: For what reason do you eat with the publicans and sinners? The point of the question was directed against Jesus, for His disciples would hardly have gone to the feast without Him. They want Him to feel that they resented His disregard of their customs. (Kretzmann)

eat ... with tax collectors and 'sinners. Table fellowship was an integral part of Jesus' ministry. He frequently used the occasion of a meal to create fellowship with people. Jesus' table fellowship may be defined as the gracious *presence* of Jesus at table, where he *teaches* about the kingdom of God and shares a *meal* in an atmosphere of acceptance, friendship, and peace. His usual table fellowship practice combined those three ingredients: his presence, his teaching, and his eating. (CC)

Table fellowship simply means the eating of a meal together and the fellowship among the participants that such a meal entailed in ancient Near Eastern culture. The presence of the table fellowship motif in the biblical record has long been recognized. It is a dominant theme in many monographs and articles on the NT, particularly Luke-Acts. Sometimes it is simply referred to as the meal motif or the theme of food. (CC)

Each of those components is significant. The presence of Jesus was the presence of God incarnate. While many of the meals might have appeared ordinary to the casual observer, those with opened eyes of faith see that *God* was present. In Jesus, God was present *with sinners* gathered around the table. Jesus' table fellowship was *inclusive* as God welcomed fallen creatures into his presence. Jesus explained that his table fellowship was itself an expression of the *new era of salvation* in which all people are invited into the kingdom (Lk 5:33–39, following the inclusive meal of 5:27–32). Jesus' table fellowship was *revelatory* because the meals proclaimed and celebrated the presence of the King, the Bridegroom among his attendants (5:34). They were also revelatory as Jesus *taught* about the kingdom. That pertains particularly to the Last Supper/Lord's Supper, where Jesus taught about the significance of the meal itself in terms of his sacrificial death—the giving of his body and the shedding of his blood—and spoke of his future eating and drinking when the kingdom would come in all its fullness (22:16–20). In a striking way the Emmaus meal too was revelatory as the disciples recognized Jesus in the breaking of the bread (24:30, 35). (CC)

This excursus endeavors to show that Jesus' table fellowship, as depicted in Luke-Acts, has profound implications for the ongoing life of the Christian church today. Tracing the table fellowship theme through Luke and into Acts reveals how the meals of Jesus' earthly ministry culminated at the Last Supper with the institution of the Lord's Supper and how that Supper became a central element in the worship life of the emerging church. After Jesus broke bread with two disciples on the very first Easter Sunday (Lk 24:28–35), the church had the regular practice (Acts 2:42, 46) of gathering on the first day of the week—the day of resurrection—in order to break bread (Acts 20:7). (CC)

The contemporary theological implications of the table fellowship theme center in the Lord's Supper in the context of the church's worship life. Since Jesus' table fellowship consisted of teaching at table as well as eating, his practice set the precedent for the two main parts of the liturgy in the classic shape of the Divine Service: the Service of the Word (teaching) and the Service of the Sacrament (Supper). The biblical motif of Jesus' table fellowship informs the church's understanding of the vital importance of the Divine Service for sustaining her ongoing life in Christ. In the Divine Service, Jesus continues to carry on his ministry of table fellowship. He provides the communicants at his Table with similar but even more sublime benefits than those enjoyed by guests at his earthly meals. Through his Supper and the accompanying teaching

of his Word, he preserves his church on earth in the true faith, in communion with all the saints and in eager expectation of his imminent return, when he will usher the faithful into the eternal wedding feast. (CC)

Throughout the various peoples and cultures in the ancient Near East, table fellowship signified a high level of friendship and unity. To invite a guest to a meal was a universally understood act of hospitality. Therefore Jesus' meals sent a clear message to his contemporaries:

In the East, even today, to invite a man to a meal was an honor. It was an offer of peace, trust, brotherhood, and forgiveness; in short, sharing a table meant sharing life. In Judaism in particular, table-fellowship means fellowship before God, for the eating of a piece of broken bread by everyone who shares in a meal brings out the fact that they all have a share in the blessing which the master of the house had spoken over the unbroken bread. Thus Jesus' meals with the publicans and sinners, too, are not only events on a social level, not only an expression of his unusual humanity and social generosity and his sympathy with those who were despised, but had an even deeper significance. They are an expression of the mission and message of Jesus (Mk 2:17), eschatological meals, anticipatory celebrations of the feast in the end-time (Lk 13:28f.; Mt 8:11–12), in which the community of the saints is already being represented (Mk 2:19). The inclusion of sinners in the community of salvation, achieved in table-fellowship, is the most meaningful expression of the message of the redeeming love of God. (CC)

Ancient Israel bears witness to the importance of table fellowship as an occasion at which God often communicated his promised salvation. The history of Israel is punctuated at significant times with God's presence at a meal. (CC)

God provided fruit trees in Eden, but Adam and Eve violated the fellowship boundaries set by God when they ate from the forbidden tree in the presence of the serpent, plunging the world into sin. In subsequent history, God begins to restore his fallen creation, and his redemption is often accompanied by or celebrated with a meal. For example, in Genesis 18, God appears to Abraham via three men, one of whom turns out to be the Lord. (The three perhaps reflect the Trinity, and the Lord in the form of a man may prefigure the later incarnation of Christ.) Abraham and Sarah show hospitality to their guests by preparing a meal (cf. Heb 13:2). In the context of that setting God promises a son who would continue the seed of Eve until the coming of the Seed who would crush the serpent's head (Gen 18:10–14; cf. Gen 3:15). (CC)

The covenants Yahweh made with his people often were celebrated with a meal. The Passover (Exodus 12; Josh 5:10–12; 2 Ki 23:21–23; etc.) was a key institution in the OT since it celebrated the exodus deliverance, the salvation event that was the birth of the nation of Israel. God instructed Israel to use the setting of the Passover meal to inculcate the fundamental doctrines of God, his people, and salvation (Ex 12:24–27). *This divinely appointed juxtaposition of teaching and eating is OT precedent for Jesus' table fellowship and Christian worship.* On Mt. Sinai, after the exodus, Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy elders "saw God and ate and drank" (Ex 24:9–11). The suddenness of that meal and the lack of human provisions for it perhaps suggest a divinely provided meal, as with the manna, quail, and water from the rock during Israel's subsequent wilderness wanderings. (CC)

The sacrificial and liturgical worship at the tabernacle and then the temple involved many kinds of meals, some only for the priests, but others for the worshiper(s) too (Leviticus 1–7). Synagogue worship from the time of the exile down through the NT era attempted to recall and preserve this theological heritage of OT sacrifices and meals, even when the people were far

away from Jerusalem and when the temple with its altar lay in ruins (the exilic period and after A.D. 70). The weekly remembrance of the Passover in the Sabbath evening Seder meal helped give a liturgical shape to the daily and weekly life of the Jewish people. (CC)

It was within this milieu of weekly Jewish Sabbath meals and synagogue worship that Luke records the table fellowship of Jesus. Of the gospel writers, Luke records the most meals of Jesus with different categories of people: tax collectors, sinners, Pharisees, and disciples. The chief Lukan passages involving table fellowship are the following: Lk 5:27–39, the feast with Levi the tax collector; 7:18–35, the bridegroom and the ascetic; 7:36–50, at table Jesus forgives a sinful woman who anointed his feet; 9:10–17, the feeding of the five thousand; 14:1–24, Sabbath healing, meal etiquette, and the banquet; 15:1–2, 11–32, meals with sinners and the meal in the story of the prodigal son; 19:1–10, Jesus lodges with Zacchaeus; 22:14–38, the Last Supper; and 24:13–35, the Emmaus meal. The risen Christ also eats fish in 24:41–43. Moreover, the Lukan theme of “the breaking of bread” spans the gospel and Acts. The breaking (κλάω, κατακλάω, κλάσις) of bread in Luke-Acts occurs in the context of events that testify that Jesus is the Christ and is graciously present with his people: the feeding of the five thousand (Lk 9:16); the institution of the Lord’s Supper (22:19); the Christophany at the Emmaus meal (24:30, 35); the early church’s regular celebration of the Lord’s Supper (Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7); the resurrection of Eutychus (20:11); and St. Paul’s prophecy of divine rescue (27:35). (CC)

The table fellowship theme, in its widest sense, includes more than those actual meals recorded by Luke. Even in other settings, much of Jesus’ teaching includes table metaphors that reflect his view of table fellowship and the eschatological kingdom. The Gospel message of forgiveness, reconciliation, and the Great Reversal may be expressed through table fellowship language even when the meal occurs only in the form of a parable (e.g., Lk 14:7–24; 15:11–32). Table fellowship includes teaching about meals and is itself a form of teaching. (CC)

*Luke makes use of table fellowship metaphors and language as he systematically presents Jesus’ table fellowship to teach about Jesus Christ and his kingdom and about the Lord’s Supper and the liturgy. This is a dominant matrix of language and ideas in the gospel. It brings together many themes in the service of catechesis and worship. **Jesus combined teaching and eating to communicate God’s kingdom, and his practice of table fellowship gave rise to the classic shape of the Christian liturgy: the Service of the Word (teaching) and the Service of the Sacrament (Supper).*** (CC)

There is common ground between the Passover Seder, Jesus’ meals during his earthly ministry, and the celebration of “the breaking of the bread” by the early church. All are sacred meals at which God is present in a fuller sense than at other meals. At each meal divine teaching accompanies the repast. Nevertheless, the language that the church properly reserves for the Lord’s Supper is not appropriate for describing the full range of these biblical meals, since only some of them were celebrations of the Sacrament, and the other meals did not convey the same benefits as Holy Communion. The language of table fellowship encompasses all of these biblical repasts, while allowing for the significant differences in the benefits God bestowed through them. Calling all of these meals instances of table fellowship by no means implies that they all were celebrations of the Lord’s Supper. Yet the language of table fellowship intends to capture the connections indicated by the terminology of Luke himself, who records “the breaking of the bread” in a variety of settings: seemingly ordinary meals (Acts 20:11; 27:35), miracles of Jesus (Lk 9:16; 24:30, 35), and celebrations of the Sacrament (Lk 22:19; Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7). (CC)

For God to feed his people in the intimacy of the table would call to the Jewish mind the rich OT precedent for this practice. *But for God to become flesh* and sit at table with them, giving them

food from his own fleshly hands, was something surprisingly new indeed. Nevertheless, it was consistent with the character of God as portrayed in the OT—the God who promised to dwell in the midst of his people and feed them (e.g., Deuteronomy 26; 1 Kings 8). God was present with his people at OT meals such as the Passover and the shared temple sacrifices, but God was not yet *incarnate*. In Jesus, God was present *in the flesh* to establish a table fellowship of eating and drinking with his people. And Jesus’ practice was startlingly new—even scandalous—for another reason. While there were strict limits on those invited to many OT meals (e.g., the Passover; the temple sacrifices), Jesus freely ate and drank with sinners. (CC)

Jesus’ inclusive table fellowship was a factor in his death. His practice of supping with sinners is one of the reasons “the chief priests and the rulers [Pharisees]” (Lk 24:20) sought his execution. Opposition to Jesus by the Pharisees because of his meal practices begins early in the gospel (5:29–39; cf. 7:39). Since God’s kingdom comes through the presence and death of Jesus, his table fellowship is connected with the coming of the kingdom. Table fellowship is one of the means by which Jesus proclaims the arrival of the eschatological kingdom, the dawn of a new era (5:29–39; 7:33–50), the inauguration of a new testament in his shed blood (22:20). Jesus reveals that this new testament embraces sinners and outcasts, Gentiles as well as Jews. God in his grace deigns to recline with his fallen creatures, teaching them and eating together with them. Jesus’ lifestyle at the table is one of service (22:27), and he renders the ultimate service to humanity as God’s innocent, suffering Messiah by giving up his life on the cross for the life of the world. (CC)

As one traces the table fellowship theme throughout Luke, the hearer or reader discerns a pattern in which there are *three essential elements to table fellowship: the presence of God in Jesus, his teaching, and his eating together with sinners*. The presence of Jesus at the meal makes this table fellowship different from all other meals. It is a meal with God! *Not every meal is the Lord’s Supper, but each is a supper with the Lord, and each relates to his cross and resurrection.* (CC)

Every meal in Luke-Acts has its own distinctive features and significance. In each table scene, Jesus is present to teach the participants in the meal about himself. Table fellowship reveals something about the participants in that fellowship, particularly the host at the table. The table fellowship of Jesus reveals something about who he is; therefore it has a direct relationship to Lukan Christology. At table Jesus teaches about the kingdom of God in which he, the King, is present to offer the forgiveness of sins. In every Lukan meal, the teaching of Jesus is part of the table fellowship and is essential to the meal. His teaching explains the larger significance of the meal and makes the meal a celebration of his forgiveness. Often associated with the occasion is the theme of conversion, a turning to God in repentance and faith. Those who fully participate in the fellowship and benefit from it are repentant sinners, personified by Levi the tax collector (5:27–39) and Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector, in whose house Jesus must stay (19:1–10). Those repentant sinners contrast with Simon the Pharisee (7:36–50). Even though Simon was the host, and Jesus brings forgiveness for all debtors (as illustrated in his parable in 7:40–43), Simon’s participation in the fellowship was more peripheral than that of the sinful woman because he was ungrateful. (CC)

To be sure, not everyone present at a meal with Jesus necessarily receives the forgiveness of sins. In 7:36–50, the penitent woman is absolved by Jesus (7:47–50), but Simon, the host, receives no absolution. Table fellowship with Jesus does not confer forgiveness in a mechanical, *ex opere operato* fashion; the guests who are absolved are *penitent* sinners with *faith* in Jesus. (CC)

For the repentant, Jesus’ forgiveness may be implicit, even if it is not explicitly stated in a given pericope. For example, in 5:27–39 Jesus pronounces no absolution upon Levi, the tax collector

whom he called to be an apostle, but Jesus' presence with Levi at table and Levi's banquet for Jesus imply that Levi's old way of life was a thing of the past and his new life had begun. Subsequently he is among those following Jesus. Luke would have the hearers of his gospel remember that the one who is practicing this inclusive table fellowship is the one who came to bring the kingdom of God and the forgiveness of sins in his own person. In all facets of his ministry, Jesus is bringing release for the captives, as he announced in his first sermon (4:18–19). Jesus' reputation as the one who brings forgiveness even for the worst of sinners likely was the reason the woman in 7:36–50 sought him out and anointed his feet while he was at table. (CC)

During the Galilean ministry, the essence of Jesus' teaching at meals is the kingdom of God—the kingdom that comes through his rejection to the point of death. The climactic meal during the Galilean ministry is the feeding of the five thousand (9:10–17). Here the King rules his kingdom *now* by offering food that fills the hungry (cf. 6:21). While the multiplication is miraculous, the food is just bread and fish; but the constellation of language points forward to the eschatological feast that is *not yet*. (CC)

As Jesus journeys to Jerusalem, his table fellowship has an increasingly eschatological focus. Luke 13, 14, and 15 all contain references to that future, heavenly eating that is inaugurated already now in the meals of Jesus. His lodging at the home of Zacchaeus (19:1–10) is climactic for Jesus' fellowship outside Jerusalem. As *the chief tax collector*, Zacchaeus represents all sinners. Jesus' stay with him reinforces the message of Jesus' earlier meal with “a great crowd of tax collectors and others” (5:29) in the home of Levi, another tax collector. Jesus' words to Zacchaeus are representative of his salvific ministry to the world as it is expressed in his table fellowship: “Today salvation happened to this house ... for the Son of Man came in order to seek and to save the lost” (19:9–10). (CC)

In Jerusalem, on the night when he was betrayed, Jesus, who brings the new wine for new wineskins (5:36–39), transformed the old Passover as he inaugurated the new Meal that would be celebrated throughout the new era of salvation he brings. This is a *sacramental* meal, in which he furnishes his body and blood. In Jesus' previous meals during his earthly ministry, he was present at table *in the flesh*. At the Last Supper, too, Jesus is present at table in the flesh, but for the first time he is also present *in the Sacrament*. At the Emmaus meal, Jesus would be recognized for the first time *as the crucified and risen Lord* (24:30, 35). In the subsequent celebrations of the Lord's Supper by the church in Acts (2:42, 46; 20:7) and down to the present day, Jesus is present *in the Sacrament as the crucified and risen Lord, who gives his flesh and blood for the forgiveness of sins*. (CC)

Salvation and the forgiveness of sins through the body and blood of Jesus also bring the promise of eternal life. At the Last Supper, Jesus affirms that he will “not eat it [the Passover] until such a time as it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God,” nor will he “drink from now on from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God shall come” (22:16, 18). Matthew again includes a most significant additional phrase: Jesus tells the disciples, “From now on I will not drink this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it *with you anew* in the kingdom of my Father” (Mt 26:29). The disciples who dine with Jesus will have a place at his table in the eternal kingdom feast. The Supper in which the disciples participate holds the promise of future eating and drinking when the kingdom of God fully arrives in the eschaton. Like the penitent thief (Lk 23:43), they will join Jesus in paradise. (CC)

5:31 *they who well have no need of a physician but the sick*. Not to imply that the Pharisees were “the healthy,” but that a person must recognize himself as a sinner before he can be spiritually healed. (CSB)

Christ came to heal sinners. (TLSB)

οὐ χρείαν ἔχουσιν οἱ ὑγιαίνοντες ἰατροῦ ἀλλὰ οἱ κακῶς ἔχοντες—Those who are well are the righteous, and those who are sick are sinners (5:32). The irony of Jesus' ministry is that the sinners who are sick become healthy/righteous through repentance, but the so-called "righteous" Pharisees remain sick because they do not think they are in need of repentance. Jesus is equating sin and sickness here, as he did in the healing of the paralytic (5:17–26). (CC)

5:27–32 Jesus teaches the people that He came to save sinners by leading them to repentance. No matter what your past, whether you are a notorious sinner or smugly self-righteous, Jesus calls you to a life of daily repentance. As the great physician, He can forgive all manner of sins. • Jesus, I would follow You. Lead me by repentance and faith to leave behind my old life. Amen. (TLSB)

Jesus Questioned About Fasting

33 And they said to him, “The disciples of John fast often and offer prayers, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours eat and drink.” 34 And Jesus said to them, “Can you make wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? 35 The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days.” 36 He also told them a parable: “No one tears a piece from a new garment and puts it on an old garment. If he does, he will tear the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old. 37 And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed. 38 But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins. 39 And no one after drinking old wine desires new, for he says, ‘The old is good.’”

5:33 *disciples of John fast often and offer prayers.* John the Baptist had grown up in the desert and learned to subsist on a meager, austere diet of locusts and wild honey. His ministry was characterized by a sober message and a strenuous schedule. For a contrast between Jesus' ministry and John the Baptist's see 7:24–28; Mt 11:1–19. The Pharisees also had rigorous lifestyles. But Jesus went to banquets, and his disciples enjoyed a freedom not known by the Pharisees. (CSB)

fast. While Jesus rejected fasting legalistically for display (cf. Isa 58:3–11), he himself fasted privately and permitted its voluntary use for spiritual benefit (Mt 4:2; 6:16–18). (CSB)

Fasting was typically accompanied by prayer. The Pharisees, who observed that Jesus and His disciples often went to festive occasions, but rarely (if ever) fasted, were taken aback. Hus: “Apart from the bridegroom's will you cannot lawfully make his sons to fast” (*The Church*, p 235). (TLSB)

pray – δεήσεις ποιοῦνται—Luke is the only one who mentions that the disciples of John offer prayers, foreshadowing the discussion of 11:1–13, where Jesus' disciples ask, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as *John* also taught his disciples” (11:1). Jesus' answer contains the table fellowship petition in 11:3: “Our bread for the coming day give to us day by day.” (CC)

eat and drink – οἱ δὲ σοὶ ἐσθίουσιν καὶ πίνουσιν—In contrast to the fasting of John's disciples and the Pharisees, the eating and drinking of Jesus' disciples is the expression of joyful table fellowship. (CC)

5:34 *can you make* – μὴ δύνασθε τοὺς υἱοὺς τοῦ νυμφῶνος ... ποιῆσαι νηστεύσαι—The complementary infinitives are at the end of the construction and so are the focus of the question, which is proposed (with μὴ) in such a way as to expect a negative answer: “No, of course not!” (CC)

Jesus gives His answer in figurative language. He is the Bridegroom; His disciples are the sons of the bridal feast, the best men at the wedding. The time of Christ's sojourn on earth is the wedding-feast. Now it would obviously be altogether wrong for the chief guests at a marriage-feast to give any evidence of mourning, such as fasting. Only joy and happiness should fill their hearts at this time, and find expression in their actions, John 3:29; Song of Sol. 5:1. But in the days when the Bridegroom would be taken from them, when Christ would have to enter upon the path of suffering and be taken from them, as to His visible presence, by death, then they would mourn, John 16:20, then they would give evidence of sorrow. (Kretzmann)

5:35 *the days will come* – ἐλεύσονται δὲ ἡμέραι—This expression is used in eschatological contexts (17:22; 21:6; 23:29; cf. 19:43). The reference is to the time after Jesus' death. Jesus' death is *the* eschatological moment. (CC)

5:36–38 Jesus' twin pictures of a clothing patch and a wineskin emphasized the superiority of the new over the old, fulfillment over promise. Attempts at merging the Pharisees' traditional laws with Jesus' good news of the Kingdom would inevitably result in destruction. The new Kingdom was to be embraced wholly. (TLSB)

5:36 *parable*. A teaching tool with deep roots in OT. Parables typically use a metaphorical story, suggestive imagery, and/or memorable turns of phrase to clarify a spiritual truth. Many parables illumine the nature of the Kingdom. (TLSB)

5:37 *old wineskins*. To put new wine, that has not yet stopped fermenting, into old skins, that have lost the power to stretch, is equally foolish, since the new wine will only tear the bottles. Therefore the new wine is properly put only into new bottles, or skins. (Kretzmann)

5:39 *The old is good*. Jesus was indicating the reluctance of some people to change from their traditional religious ways and try the gospel. (CSB)

The Pharisees stubbornly loved their old traditions and could not savor the Gospel. (TLSB)

Luke is the only evangelist who adds the logion of 5:39: “No one who has been drinking old [παλαιόν] [wine] wants new [νέον]; for he says, ‘The old [παλαιός] is good.’ ” This supports his understanding of the parable and sums up its application in an ironic saying. “The verse expresses the viewpoint of those who are content with the old, because they think it is good, and make no effort to try the new. It is thus an ironical comment on the Jews who refused to taste the ‘new wine’ of the gospel which was not hallowed by age.” (CC)

Humanly speaking, for a Jew and a Pharisee, old wine is qualitatively better than new wine, and one who has tasted properly aged wine would never prefer new wine. But contrary to what is normal and expected, the kingdom is hidden in new wine, a paradox that demonstrates the radical nature of the kingdom. The table fellowship of Jesus is like new wine: it breaks old barriers by including sinners and tax collectors; it bears the character of a wedding, a foretaste of the messianic feast in which the bridegroom is continually present; it brings forward into the present the eschatological blessings of salvation. In order to taste the new wine, one must radically break

with his past by repentance, turning away from the old wine and rejecting it. This is the essence of Jesus' table fellowship. The fact that Levi the tax collector embraces the new wine, and the Pharisees do not, sets up the bitter controversy between Jesus and these Jewish religious authorities that will ultimately culminate in his death, when the bridegroom will be "taken away" (5:35; cf. Is 53:8), but only temporarily. (CC)

5:33–39 Jesus fulfills God's promise to make all things new: He makes fishermen and a tax collector into disciples, He makes a leper and a paralytic whole, and He forgives sins. Unfortunately, some resist such changes, not only in Jesus' day but also in our lives. That is why He calls us to embrace the Gospel wholly. Jesus' astounding promise is this: whatever we leave behind for the sake of the kingdom of God will be replaced with much more in this age and with eternal life in the age to come (18:30). • Lord Jesus, give me grace to follow wherever You lead. By Your Spirit, strengthen me to live as Your disciple, reaching out to others in need of Your life-changing love and forgiveness. Amen. (TLSB)