

**“CALLING SINNERS”:
LEPROSY, LAMENESS, AND LEVI
LUKE 5:12-39
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Introduction

Three men in desperate need of God’s power and grace! A man with leprosy, a man who is lame, and a man named Levi. *All three desperate sinners, who are outcast from their own society- -but Jesus enters into their lives and forever changes them.*

All three men find *a definite and definitive break* with the past as in Jesus they find the power and authority of the coming of the Kingdom of God in the Person of Jesus Christ!

A man who once had a terrible skin disease is healed; a man who could not walk and was left to lay around the town and beg for food and drink; a man who was not accepted by his fellow Jews, and who stole and allied with Roman “scum”; all three of these men receive the grace of God in Jesus and are forgiven.

This passage is important for all of us. Remember the parabolic quality of Jesus’ miracles: All sinners are pictured here as those with leprosy (unclean), those with lameness (no ability inherent in oneself to seek after God), and those who are crooked and need straightening (sinners living sinful lives).

We must keep in mind how it is Dr. Luke’s purpose to keep our eyes focused on the Kingdom of God, the dawning of the Messianic Age in Jesus- -the New has come in him!

The Kingdom of God continues to grow and expand as men believe in Jesus and they are saved! Praise be to God! As Jesus ends this pericope or section of Scripture in chapter 5:33-39, the Kingdom of God in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ means that the old is passing and the new has dawned in him!

One can no longer do things the old way; the new has now come. The time of promise in the Old Testament is the old wine skins, and the time of the fulfillment in the New Testament with the coming of the Kingdom of Jesus is the new wine skins- -and Jesus and his work is the new wine! In Jesus’ coming a new period or era, or age, has dawned and there is a different way of doing things, as type gives way to substance, and promise to fulfillment in Christ!

Because the new has come in Jesus Christ (“Behold, a new creation!” - - 2 Corinthians 5:17), the old has gone- -and all three men, the leper, the lame, and Levi find a definitive break from their past as they too become part of the New Creation in Jesus Christ through the forgiveness of sins!

What is the significance of the coming of the Kingdom in power and authority in the Person and Work of Christ? Let us not forget Jesus' first recorded sermon in Luke 4:18-21:

¹⁸ *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." ²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."*

I. Leprosy (5:12-16)- A Leper Cleansed!

- a. **"A man full of leprosy"** (v. 12b): What is leprosy and what kind of life would this man "full of leprosy" have lived? Notice that Dr. Luke records as a physician the extreme, chronic case of skin disease on this man: "full of leprosy" (or "covered with leprosy").
 - i. **Leprosy** (from the *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*): the biblical word translated "leprosy" [λέπρα, ας f leprosy, skin disease] does not always refer to what we call leprosy today (Hansen's disease). The biblical word covers a variety of skin diseases. The leprosy in the Book of Leviticus that contaminates clothing and house is mold or mildew. The biblical meaning of the word we translate "leprosy" signifies diseases that are associated with uncleanness before God and man. If you have leprosy in the Bible, you are unclean and usually segregated away from others (Lev. 13:46; Num. 5:2; 2 Kings 15:5; 2 Chron. 26:16-21). Leprosy could be divine punishment (Numbers 12:9-16; 2 Kings 5:27), but God in his mercy could also heal leprosy- -and did by his grace!
 - ii. **Lepers:** Lepers were not wholly isolated from people, but they were outcasts in society who had to make their presence known in public by crying out: "***Unclean, unclean***" (cf. Lev. 13:45):

^{ESV} **Leviticus 13:45-46:** "The leprous person who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose, and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, 'Unclean, unclean.'⁴⁶ ***He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease. He is unclean. He shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp.***

Professor Leon Morris wrote: “[Leprosy] was both disfiguring and fatal and the ancient world’s only defence against it was quarantine” (Luke, TNTC, pg. 126).

Unlike the fishermen of Luke 5:1-11 who had vocations to earn their living and provide for their families, lepers could not earn a living and work with other people; they had to rely on the generosity of others to survive- -their entire existence was reliant on other’s charity!

- iii. **“The Living Dead”**: The Bible teaches us that lepers were not only unclean, but they were very much described as the “undead” or the “walking dead”. Numbers 12:12 says:

^{ESV} **Numbers 12:12** Let her not be as one dead, whose flesh is half eaten away when he comes out of his mother's womb."

^{ESV} **Job 18:13** It consumes the parts of his skin; the firstborn of death consumes his limbs.

^{ESV} **2 Kings 5:7** And when the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy?"

Leprosy can be a picture of sin and its affects on humanity; it perhaps is best to see leprosy as how humanity is affected by the fall and men live weakly and without hope in a world of sin and misery.

Leprosy seems to signify not only sin itself, but the miserable consequences of sin on men made in God’s image, making them unclean and as those who are dead.

Greek scholar R. C. Trench said that leprosy serves as a parable of our sin problem before God (unclean!). Leprosy is an “outward and visible sign of innermost spiritual corruption.” (Quoted in Hughes, *Luke*, pg. 167).

Yet there is hope in Christ!

- b. The man knows two important things about himself: (1) His condition and (2) The source of healing (v. 12c-d): **“Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.”**

- i. The man realizes that his condition before God is that he not only needs healing, he needs cleansing: “You can make me *clean*.”
 - ii. This man realizes his need for Christ alone to help him; he has faith. Though one with this disease was unclean and a picture of the walking dead, God could cure it- -and this man sought God in the Person of Jesus Christ!
- c. Jesus heals him (v. 13): ***“I will; be clean.”***

In the elaborate ritual of the Old Testament given to us in the **Book of Leviticus** (chapters 13-14), there is symbolic cleansing and blood shed in atonement (typologically). This symbolism of cleansing is fulfilled in Christ in one sentence: “I will; you are clean.” And the unclean man is restored in Christ to the believing community.

- i. What compassion: Jesus stretches out his hand and touches this unclean, leprous man (v. 13a). Perhaps the first time the man’s skin has been touch by another human being! (Jesus touches the man while many perhaps were still yelling around him: “Unclean, unclean!”)
- ii. Jesus approaches a leprous man that no one else would have wanted to be near; Jesus comes close to one who is an outcast in the community.
- iii. Jesus is the only person to make this man clean –and he is made clean.
- iv. Jesus is the only person to make this man alive while he lives as though dead.
- v. **Jesus’ touching this man is like a foreshadowing of the cross:** Jesus cleans this man while himself becoming defiled according to Law (to touch a leper was to become defiled). This is a beautiful picture of the vicarious atonement summed up on 2 Corinthians 5:21:

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

- d. Jesus continues to fulfill and honor the Law of Moses (v. 14):
- i. What does the Law of Moses teach in Leviticus 13-14?

Leviticus 14:55-57: This is the law for any case of leprous disease: for an itch,⁵⁵ for leprous disease in a garment or in a house,⁵⁶ and for a swelling or an eruption or a spot,⁵⁷ to show when it is unclean and when it is clean. This is the law for leprous disease.

There is a long eight-day process whereby leprosy is detected and typologically treated in the Old Testament in Leviticus 13-14. As the *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* teaches: Central to the entire “cleansing from leprosy” process was the priest. Sacrifice is required to authenticate (not to effect) the cleansing of human beings and houses. Those who were unclean had to live outside the camp (Lev. 13:46) showing forth a picture of unholiness and uncleanness before God.

For the Rabbis, a cure from leprosy was as difficult as raising a person from the dead (*Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, pg. 463, *Leprosy*). For the Rabbis being healed from leprosy was usually impossible.

- ii. Why does Jesus send the man to the priest?

Culturally Significant: The priest would have served as an ancient “health inspector” for Israel. If the man was cleansed of leprosy, the priest would officially declare it so after a proper ritual of sacrifice, then the man would be formally restored to the community.

Biblico-Theologically Significant: Jesus sends the man to the priest to show that in Jesus Christ, the priestly function is passing with the coming of the Great High Priest (although Jesus does not usurp the authority of the priests at this time, cf. Matthew 23:1-2). What the priest served God doing in the Old Covenant in the temple was typological for the coming of Christ. The reason Jesus sends the cleansed leper to the priest is in order that the Messianic miracle would speak for itself (that the miracle would “preach” that the Divine Messianic Kingdom-Age that has been anticipated by Israel, has come in the cleansing of the leper). Jesus says: “Go and show yourself...for a proof to the priests.” (v. 14).

Matthew 11:2-5: Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples³ and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?"⁴ And Jesus answered them, "***Go and tell John what you hear and see:***⁵ ***the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are***

cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.”

As the priest went through detailed rituals to make a person only outwardly clean from the leprous disease, Jesus the High Priest and Great Physician makes the man fully clean from within before God and man, and sends him to show the priest that the New Covenant has dawned, and that the Kingdom is coming in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ.

Jesus has invited the outcast man from the community, back into the community as clean through his divine compassion!

- iii. Why does Jesus tell the man to tell no one else? (cf. Mark 1:34; 5:43; 7:36; 8:26).

Jesus' main concern is to fulfill his Divine Messianic Mission by doing the Father's will. He performs miracles to show forth that the Kingdom of God is present in power and authority in Him! He does not want to be made a powerful earthly conqueror, and knows the people will be tempted to make him a zealous revolutionary. Jesus tells the man to be silent, but from the Gospel of Mark, we know that he tells, and Jesus' popularity grows even more.

Jesus doesn't want to be a mere miracle-worker as the devil has already tempted him in Luke 4; Jesus wants to make known the Kingdom of God in his Words and Deeds, and to go the way of the cross in order to lay down his life to make clean a people through his once and for all sacrifice of himself!

- e. Jesus' fame and "stardom" continues to grow and spread (v. 15)
- f. Jesus has prayerful priorities he must be attentive to in order to receive the power and grace from the Father to fulfill his Divine Messianic Mission.

II. Lameness (5:17-26)- A Paralyzed Man Forgiven and Healed!

- a. **Setting:** Dr. Luke gives us a scene change where there are now the "authorities in Israel" and the visible church of this time ("organized Judaism" of the time period): *Pharisees and teachers of the Law* (v. 17b). Dr. Luke in setting this scene shows us that Jesus' popularity has reached the authorities within Israel and they think his ministry important enough to go and investigate (notice they are from Judea and Jerusalem!).

And thus begins Jesus' controversy with the Pharisees (Dr. Luke introduces tension into his narrative because Jesus' fame and 'stardom' is increasing!).

- i. **Who were the Pharisees?** According to the excellent resource *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, the Pharisees were a distinct party in Judaism at the time of Jesus who were greatly influential (Josephus says that there were about 6000 Pharisees in Jesus' time). They had their own vision of what Israel's standing as God's covenant people entailed. Characteristic of the Pharisaic position was their adherence to a body of traditional material handed down "from the fathers," which defined correct behavior in a number of ways and which represented both an interpretation of and a supplement to the Law of the Pentateuch.

In the Gospels, Pharisees are generally depicted as opponents of Jesus, critical of his behavior, hostile in their questions, malicious in their deliberations. In turn, their piety is attacked by Jesus as hypocritical, their spiritual leadership is declared bankrupt, and they are charged with leading Israel to its doom (DJG, pg. 609).

- ii. **Hedging the Law:** The Pharisees were so concerned about breaking God's Law, that they would "hedge" or "fence" the Law. This meant that if the third commandment said "Thou shall not take the Name of the LORD in vain..." in order for them to avoid breaking this Law, they would not even say God's Name at all (the Jews referred to God as *Ha-Shem*: "the Name"). As Jesus will teach them and cut down all of their safe hedges and fences through his powerful Word, the breaking of the Law is not merely external but from the heart (Matt. 15:1ff). We break the Law of God in word, thought, and deeds!
- iii. **Whose Interpretation?** A lot of the animosity between Jesus and the Pharisees comes down to an interpretation. Jesus interpreted the Old Testament Scriptures correctly as the Divine Son finding their fulfillment in himself (in his Person and Work). Jesus' "new" yet authoritative interpretation that was perceived by the crowds, was an affront and offense to the Pharisees' interpretation handed down by the fathers.

b. A paralyzed man is brought to Jesus for healing (vv. 18-19)

- i. What would a paralyzed man during this time be like?

1. Outcast

2. Beggarly- depending on the grace of others for their help (as the man's friends bring him to Jesus through the roof because of their great faith!).
 3. Hopeless without a cure for his ailment.
 4. A lifetime of grief, and **IF** his sins did cause him to be paralyzed, a memory full of regret and shame (see below).
- ii. Two obstacles threaten this man's healing:
1. **The Crowd** (v. 19) - the crowd separates the paralytic from Jesus.
 2. **The Pharisees** (v. 21) - the Jewish authorities interrupt Jesus' time with the man once he does benefit from his presence.
- c. Jesus forgives him of his sins, then he heals him of his being lame (vv. 20, 24-25):

“Man, your sins are forgiven you...I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go home.”

- i. **Why does Jesus forgive him first?** Is this to imply that sin causes one to be paralyzed or lame? Sin does indeed cause all sicknesses and sufferings in this world, but the Bible does not teach that a ***particular sin in one's life*** causes a disease as a direct consequence of result necessarily (cf. John 9). Here in this particular case, it may appear that this man's sins perhaps *have caused him to be paralyzed* (pace Geldenhuys, Marshall). Other scholars disagree and say that the general sinful disorder of the creation is more likely in view (Hendriksen, Bock).
 - ii. ***The priority of sins being forgiven first remind us that this is the most important thing that we need before God.*** We may indeed need healing, and we await our ultimate healing in the New Heavens and the New Earth where God will wipe away every tear caused by sin (Rom. 8:18-25; Rev. 21:1-7), but we need the forgiveness of our sins!
 - iii. Both healing and forgiveness of sin is something that only God can do; if Jesus does this, he is God and the Kingdom of God has come in him!
- d. Jesus interaction with the scribes and Pharisees: The issue is blasphemy!

- i. ***“Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?”*** (v. 21; Blaspheming God’s name was punished by stoning; cf. Leviticus 24:10-23). This is foreshadowing of Jesus’ later conviction that leads to his crucifixion.
 - ii. This is true: Only God can forgive sins against him. **Example:** If a billionaire lent 100 million to a man, and the man did not pay his debt to the billionaire, only the billionaire could release the man who owed him the debt; I could not come into the picture, give the billionaire a call and say: “Hey, just wanted you to know that I forgave the man who owes you a debt and cancelled anything that would hinder your fellowship with him!”
 - iii. ***However, the billionaire could forgive and cancel the debt (He is the one to whom the debt is owed!).***
 - iv. The issue here is either that Jesus is blasphemous, or that Jesus is God.
 - v. Jesus shows himself to be God, equal with the Father in power, authority and glory: “Which is easier, to say, ***‘Your sins are forgiven you,’*** or to say, ***‘Rise and walk’?*** (v. 23).
 - vi. **The Logic of Jesus’ response:** “It is easier to say something that cannot be visually verified (forgiven sins) than to say something that can be visually substantiated (lame man rising and walking). The easier claim from the observer’s point of view is the claim to forgive sins, since one cannot prove it wrong! The issue is this: Is Jesus’ claim an empty word or the real thing? Does Jesus’ declaration of forgiveness have God’s word and power behind it?” (Bock, pg. 485).
 - vii. The Pharisees scratch their noggins on this question...
 - viii. Jesus answers for them: “But that you may know that the Son of Man has **authority** to forgive sins.
 - ix. Just as Jesus taught with authority (not like the Pharisees and the scribes, cf. Matthew 7:28-29), so Jesus also has an authority to forgive sins that they do not have!
- e. The formerly paralytic lame man is now able to go home on his own glorifying God (vv. 25-26). This display of Jesus’ power and authority in healing the lame man causes many to be amazed, filled with awe, and to glorify God! The Kingdom has come!

III. Levi (5:27-32)- A Sinner Saved!

- a. Jesus calls a tax collector (“publican”) named Levi to follow him (v. 27). Dr. Luke follows the lame man being healed spiritually and physically, by showing how Jesus has the authority and power to forgive sins- -even the *sins of a tax collector*.
- b. Levi leaves everything he has (as the disciples in 5:1-11) because he knows Jesus is the Source from which all he needs comes from!

- i. What was a tax collector like during this time?

1. **Culturally considered**: Israel was under Roman rule and tax collectors who were Jews like Levi, who were working for Rome to take taxes from the Jewish people were considered a hated, outcast bunch. Leon Morris says that tax collectors in Jesus’ time were disliked both as **collaborators and as extortioners** (Luke, pg. 131). So rare was honesty in the tax collecting profession that a Roman writer remarked in amazement that he once saw a monument to an honest tax collector (Quoted in Hughes, pg. 183).
2. **Biblically considered**: Tax collectors are people who are listed with sinners (those who live lifestyles of sin outside the covenant), such as prostitutes, robbers, and brothel-keepers; those who are sinful lawbreakers against God! The Jewish Talmud considers tax collectors as a class of dishonest robbers (*Sanhedrin*, 25b).

^{ESV} **Matthew 5:46** For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? ***Do not even the tax collectors do the same?***

^{ESV} **Matthew 18:17** If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as ***a Gentile and a tax collector***.

^{ESV} **Luke 15:1** Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him.

^{ESV} **Matthew 21:31-32**: Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, **"Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you."**³² For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe

him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him.

ii. How is Levi a parabolic picture of all sinners?

1. Levi was a picture of not only outcasts in society (“sinners”), but he was considered a real low-life with no right to anything that God could offer to him, having lived his life in such a sinful and dishonest way!
2. To have Levi to leave everything and follow Jesus is ***perhaps a greater miracle than a cure for leprosy and lameness!***
3. Levi was extremely wealthy, as all tax collectors were, and so this shows the power of God, knowing that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God (cf. Matt. 19:21-26 with the “Rich Young Ruler”):

Jesus said to him, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." ²² When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. ²³ And Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴ Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." ²⁵ When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, "***Who then can be saved?***" ²⁶ ***But Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."***

Jesus shows in the life of Levi that with God all things are possible- -including the salvation of a sinful, rich and dishonest man!

4. Levi leaves his post of tax collecting immediately (in Greek: aorist participle meaning “was following him”); this could have caused great danger to him as a sort of employee of Rome. Unlike the fishermen who Jesus called and who could return to the fishing if they had desired to do so, **Levi could never go back!** Dr. Luke emphasizes here

the nature of Levi's *decisive and definitive break with the past!*

5. Levi is a picture of all sinners who do not have anything to offer God- -not even their best righteousness.
6. As sinners consider themselves before God, they must come to see themselves as without Christ as prostitutes, robbers, and tax collectors (sinful lawbreakers!).
7. How do you see yourself? If you are honest before God, do you see yourself as someone who is righteous and deserves God's goodness and grace? Or do you see yourself (as you truly are in God's sight) a tax collector and sinner? Remember this important truth: The object of Jesus' mission is repentance leading to faith in Jesus (5:32); we must be reminded then:

"The righteous cannot repent, but sinners can."
(Bock, pg. 498).

8. God called this "despicable, low-life, sinner" to be his disciple, and to even write one of the Gospels of Jesus' life-
-what grace and mercy!!
- c. Levi celebrates his new relationship and definitive break from the past (v. 29).
 - i. To eat a meal with a person in the ancient world was to show yourself their friendship and full acceptance.
 - ii. Jesus, by eating with sinners, is showing his friendship and acceptance of sinners through repentance and belief.
 - d. The Pharisees and their scribes (scribes could be Pharisees or Sadducees) grumble and ask: "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"

^{ESV} Luke 7:34 The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'

- e. Jesus answers by explaining to him that he came not for the well, or for the righteous (those are the ones who think they are righteous before God), but Jesus came for the sick and sinful (vv. 31-32).

As one teacher said it: “The Church is the only fellowship in the world where the one requirement for membership is the unworthiness of the candidate.”

- f. Jesus does not leave the sinners in their sins, but calls them to repentance, and heals them so that they will repent and be healed of their sinful iniquities:

“I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.” (v. 32)

Application: Church: We must be very careful, sober and cautious about the Christian life, never supposing and presuming that we have “arrived” as sinners saved by grace. We are indeed justified in Christ, and have his righteousness given to us if we are believers; however, we must never forget our daily need of his grace for us!

We must be reminded that *the Church is not an elite social club of “good-church-going-folk” but a hospital where the sick and sinful have come to find a doctor and to be continually and daily cured of their sinful pollution in our sanctification.*

The Church is not a place for us to begin to think of ourselves higher than we ought. We must keep in mind what the Apostle Paul taught Timothy- - that he was the chief of sinners:

^{KJV} 1 Timothy 1:15 This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.

This doesn't mean that truly Paul was the greatest or chiefest of all sinners, but that before God he truly understood his sins in words, thoughts, and deeds. *It means that all of us if asked if we are the chief of sinners, should be quick to step forward- -and receive God's rich and forgiving grace!*

IV. Last Minute Lesson (5:33-39)- A New Creation!

- a. Pharisees and scribes compare Jesus and his disciples' behavior with the piety and behavior of John the Baptist and His disciples (v. 33). We will consider this further in the next sermon (D.V.).
- b. Jesus explains that a foreshadowing, or foretaste of the Last Day, Messianic Wedding Feast has begun in the coming of Jesus Christ: While the bridegroom of the bride is with the guests, they shall celebrate and experience the power and authority of the New Creation that is to come fully when Jesus returns (vv. 34-35) –they shall fast after he leaves.

c. Parable: Old Garments-New Garments/ Old Wine and New Wineskins

- i. Context: All three men (and the disciples at the beginning of chapter 5:1-11) have experienced a definitive break with the “old” the past, and are now part of the new creation in Christ.
- ii. The old way of living in a time of Old Testament types and anticipation, have been fulfilled in the coming of the New Testament in him. The Pharisees compare Jesus’ disciples with John the Baptist’s disciples; this is a false assumption. John’s disciples (and the Pharisees) were disciples of anticipation and promise, rooted in the Old Covenant as the last of the teachers and prophets sent to Israel (cf. Acts 19:1-6); Jesus and his disciples represented the new era of the New Covenant.
- iii. ***Jesus has not come to “patch up” Judaism***, but to declare something wholly new, yet something new that was prophesied by Isaiah concerning the Messianic Age (Isa. 65-66; regardless of how mistaken the interpretation of the Pharisees and scribes!). As I. Howard Marshall commented: “The point [Jesus is making] is simply that the gospel cannot be contained within Judaism without destroying both. The new ways in which God is dealing with humanity through Jesus cannot be mixed with the old ways” (Marshall, pg. 227; Bock, pg. 521).
- iv. There is a new way of doing things now that the Kingdom has dawned. For example, the old way of seeking forgiveness was through a sacrificial system (a type of things to come and forgiveness in the Old Covenant); but now in Jesus Christ, a new time has dawned in him: forgiveness of sins will be found in Jesus, and through the body and blood that he lays down once and for all for his people!
- v. **Replacement Theology or Fulfillment Theology?** Reformed folk following Jesus’ parabolic teaching here (5:33-39) do not engage (as some say unfairly) in what has come to be known popularly as ***Replacement Theology*** (a derogatory straw-man term that is supposed to show Reformed theology’s disregard for the well-being of Israel among other things). What we do engage in as Reformed folk, and what Jesus is expressly and explicitly teaching is ***Fulfillment Theology***. Any hope for Israel or Gentile will not be found in Judaism, but in the fulfillment of God’s mission to Israel in Jesus Christ and His Church. Jesus is saying that the old way of doing things (the old garment and old wine) has given way

“in the fullness of the times” (Gal. 4:4; cf. 2 Cor. 5:17) to the new way in Christ (the new garment and new wine of the gospel). However, many still like the old wine better (5:39)!

- vi. **New Testament Scholar** Joel B. Green wrote: “...Jesus interprets his behaviors, which are questionable and innovative to some onlookers, *as manifestations of God’s ancient purpose coming to fruition*, while the concerns of the Pharisees are rejected not only as innovative⁴ but also as quite inconsistent with God’s program.” [My emphasis] (Luke, NICNT, pg. 250).

Exegetical Notes

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." [Leprosy was an ancient, horrible skin disease (the term 'leprosy' can be one of several ancient skin diseases), that caused one to live lonely lives with other lepers.]

¹³ And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I will; be clean." And immediately the leprosy left him. [The man "full of leprosy" (v. 12) knew that Jesus could heal him; he fell on his face and begged Jesus, and Jesus, by simply willing it was able with power and authority to make his clean.]

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." [Remember the parabolic quality of Jesus' miracles here: the man truly has leprosy, but he is unclean before God and needs cleansing. All sinners may not really have leprosy, but we need cleansing before God; and only God can provide the cleansing with need in Jesus. Jesus tells the man not to tell anyone, but he continues to keep the Law of Moses (cf. Leviticus 14). Why does Jesus want the man to go tell the priest ("for a proof to them"), but not the people? (see also: Mark 1:34; 5:43; 7:36; 8:26)]

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. [Jesus' family continues to grow as reports are heard that the Kingdom of God with power and authority are found in him. Great crowds continue to hear him and receive his healing touch.]

¹⁶ But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray. [Jesus' priorities was to continue to seek the father first through prayer; even though he was well loved and his teaching was drawing many, in order to accomplish his Divine Messianic Mission he had to have his "prayer priorities" in the correct order and place.]

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. [Scene change: "On one of those days...."; Enter: Pharisees and teachers of the law who had come to hear Jesus; Jesus' Kingdom Power was found in Jesus.]

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. [So many great crowds, and the man cannot find his way to Jesus; he must be carried because he is paralyzed. Being paralyzed in the ancient world, you were destined to beg if you had no family to care for you. This man is a picture of all sinners again: we are paralyzed, without any inherent power to seek after God. There is a priority on forgiveness here- -then the healing!]

²⁰ And when he saw their faith, he said, "Man, your sins are forgiven you." [The paralyzed man knows that Jesus is the one who can heal him! Jesus does not heal him when he sees his faith, but forgives his sins, which tells us that the healings that Jesus performed were parabolic, that is designed by God to show Jesus' Kingdom power and authority again- -this is what becomes the central issue now!]

²¹ And the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, saying, "Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" [They have a point if Jesus is not God; if sinful man owes an infinite debt of sin, and he has sinned against God, then Jesus clearing the debt, and forgiving for God is not right- -it is downright blasphemous! However, because Jesus is God, and as the God-Man he is sent from God, he has power and authority to clear the debt sinful man has against God, and to forgive as God. The truth that the Pharisees speaks is important: "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'? [As always, Jesus puts to them a question that silences them. He says you have two options: 1) I can say your sins are forgiven (merely); or 2) I can say "rise and walk" and make the lame man able to walk again. Which do you want me to do; I have power and authority to do both!]

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." [Jesus forgives the man's sins, then he tells him with authority to pick up the bed that he was brought in on as a lame, paralyzed man, and walk home... forgiven!]

²⁵ And immediately he rose up before them and picked up what he had been lying on and went home, glorifying God. [Here is another picture of Jesus' great power and authority, and how he can take the lame and hopeless sinner and turn them by his grace into one who glorifies God!]

²⁶ And amazement seized them all, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, "We have seen extraordinary things today." [Jesus' healing touch and his forgiveness causes all to be filled with awe and wonder!]

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. [The third recipient of Jesus' grace is Levi, a tax collector. In contrast to a man with leprosy, and a lame man, Levi seems to be the "apple" in a group of oranges; but this is not so! Levi is a sinner too! Dr. Luke wants us to see that Levi's tax collecting was full of sin, and made him just as much an outcast as these other two men!]

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?" [The Pharisees and scribes cannot understand why Jesus spends time with those who are "unworthy" and "sinful" in their eyes; they fail to understand that the point of the Word of God and the teaching of the Law is to make men aware of their sins and turn to God for grace.]

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." [Jesus is not saying to them that there are truly righteous people in the world (cf. Rom. 3:9-23); he is saying that those who think they are righteous and without need (as those who resisted John the Baptist's symbolic baptism), he did not come to save. He came to make sinners aware of God's holiness and their terrible predicament, so that they might turn in repentance as sinners to Jesus for help! He is the Great Physician who has come for the sick people –the outcasts of society as Dr. Luke wants to point out here in chapter 5.]

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.'" [Jesus is saying that with the dawning of the New Covenant Kingdom in Him, the old typological way of doing things, the old age of promises, has given way to the full substance and fulfillment of the Old Testament in Him (cf. Luke 24:24-27; 44-49). The point here in the context is that the Pharisees and scribes do not detect a change in the passing away of the old and the dawning of the new, because they are rejecting the Person the work of Christ.]

Scripture Lesson

^{ESV} **Leviticus 13:45-46:** "The leprous person who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose, and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, 'Unclean, unclean.' ⁴⁶ He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease. He is unclean. He shall live alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp.

^{ESV} **Leviticus 14:1-7, 14-20, 49-57:** The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ² "This shall be the law of the leprous person for the day of his cleansing. He shall be brought to the priest, ³ and the priest shall go out of the camp, and the priest shall look. Then, if the case of leprous disease is healed in the leprous person, ⁴ the priest shall command them to take for him who is to be cleansed two live clean birds and cedarwood and scarlet yarn and hyssop. ⁵ And the priest shall command them to kill one of the birds in an earthenware vessel over fresh water. ⁶ He shall take the live bird with the cedarwood and the scarlet yarn and the hyssop, and dip them and the live bird in the blood of the bird that was killed

over the fresh water. ⁷ And he shall sprinkle it seven times on him who is to be cleansed of the leprous disease. Then he shall pronounce him clean and shall let the living bird go into the open field.....

.... ¹⁴ The priest shall take some of the blood of the guilt offering, and the priest shall put it on the lobe of the right ear of him who is to be cleansed and on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot. ¹⁵ Then the priest shall take some of the log of oil and pour it into the palm of his own left hand ¹⁶ and dip his right finger in the oil that is in his left hand and sprinkle some oil with his finger seven times before the LORD. ¹⁷ And some of the oil that remains in his hand the priest shall put on the lobe of the right ear of him who is to be cleansed and on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot, on top of the blood of the guilt offering. ¹⁸ And the rest of the oil that is in the priest's hand he shall put on the head of him who is to be cleansed. Then the priest shall make atonement for him before the LORD. ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ And the priest shall offer the burnt offering and the grain offering on the altar. Thus the priest shall make atonement for him, and he shall be clean....

...⁴⁹ And for the cleansing of the house he shall take two small birds, with cedarwood and scarlet yarn and hyssop, ⁵⁰ and shall kill one of the birds in an earthenware vessel over fresh water ⁵¹ and shall take the cedarwood and the hyssop and the scarlet yarn, along with the live bird, and dip them in the blood of the bird that was killed and in the fresh water and sprinkle the house seven times. ⁵² Thus he shall cleanse the house with the blood of the bird and with the fresh water and with the live bird and with the cedarwood and hyssop and scarlet yarn. ⁵³ And he shall let the live bird go out of the city into the open country. So he shall make atonement for the house, and it shall be clean." ⁵⁴ This is the law for any case of leprous disease: for an itch, ⁵⁵ for leprous disease in a garment or in a house, ⁵⁶ and for a swelling or an eruption or a spot, ⁵⁷ to show when it is unclean and when it is clean. This is the law for leprous disease.

^{ESV} **Acts 10:36** As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), ³⁷ you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: ³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. ³⁹ And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, ⁴⁰ but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, ⁴¹ not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴² And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead.

^{ESV} **Matthew 11:1-6:** When Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in their cities. ² Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples ³ and said to him, "Are you the one

who is to come, or shall we look for another?"⁴ And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see:⁵ the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.⁶ And blessed is the one who is not offended by me."

^{ESV} **Matthew 21:31-32:** Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you.³² For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him.

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