

Luke 5

by John Nelson Darby

John Nelson Darby's sermon on Luke 5 emphasizes the transformative power of Christ's word and grace in calling sinners to repentance and obedience.

Scripture: Luke 5:4-10, Luke 5:12-13, Luke 5:20, Luke 5:27-32, Luke 5:36-39

Topics: "Obedience to God's Word", "Grace"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the transformative power of the Word of God as demonstrated in Luke 5, where Jesus calls Peter and performs miracles that reveal His authority and grace. The sermon illustrates how the Word reaches the heart, leading to true obedience and a relationship with Christ, as seen in Peter's response to Jesus' command to let down his nets. Darby highlights that the presence of God can be sensed even by the unconverted, yet true connection comes from faith and obedience to His Word. The call of Levi, a publican, further exemplifies the boundless grace of Jesus, who reaches out to sinners and breaks the old religious order. Ultimately, the message is about the necessity of being drawn to Christ, recognizing our unworthiness, and embracing the grace that transforms our lives.

Transcript

It is interesting to know the progressive power of the word of God. The Lord was preaching, as related at the close of chapter 4, and in so doing, as well as in the miracles He wrought, He was manifesting the power of goodness. Thus, in performing miracles, two purposes had to be accomplished - confirmation of the testimony given, and present deliverance from the power of Satan. But His great business was preaching the kingdom of God. He will set up the kingdom in power by-and-by, but His great object then was (and is) to bring the heart into contact with God; and the word does this more than miracles.

58 Verse 1. In a measure even the unconverted are sensible of the presence of God. Adam was, when he tried to hide himself. When the gospel is preached with power, crowds are gathered together by it, touched, perhaps, by something new, but without fruit. So it was with the Lord's preaching and miracles. We know their motives were selfish often, yet He went on all the same. Come for the blessing of man, He would associate others with Himself in this work of grace; but He calls them in such a way as leaves no glory to man. He "saw two ships standing by the lake, but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets. And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would launch out a little from the land; and he sat down and taught the multitudes out of the ship. Now when he had left off speaking, he said to Simon, Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a

draught" (v. 2-4). The word had authority in the conscience. Peter and Andrew had seen Jesus before, but had not yet staid with Him; there had not been sufficient power in their faith to attach them to Christ. There are many now, as ever, who own the authority of the word, and yet not attached by its power to His person - many absorbed by their every-day pursuits, the word not having laid hold of their souls so as to make them walk thoroughly with Christ. It is one thing simply to hear His word when spoken to them; quite a different thing when the word reaches them, and becomes the spring and motive of all their ways. So, here, these men had spent a little time with Jesus, had heard Him speak, and owned Him as Messiah; so, now also, we see obedience to His word when it comes to them. They launch out at His word, and at His word they let down their nets.

The miracle which the Lord wrought was one every way suited to act on those concerned. Their own powerlessness was confessed. "Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing." Man could do nothing in such a case: if Jesus could, it was because everything was at His disposal. "At thy word I will let down the net" (v. 5).

59 Verses 6-8. "And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes, and their net brake. And they beckoned unto their partners . . . and they came and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink." There was not even strength to receive of themselves. "When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." If the word of Jesus had not reached Peter's heart, he would merely have obeyed it as a means of temporal help; but he owns Him as Lord, hearing far more in the words spoken. His conscience was reached. The Lord Himself is revealed to Peter, and that shews Peter himself. When the eye of God is consciously upon us, we see in ourselves what He saw. This was Peter's case. He, when brought into God's presence, feels that he has been deceiving himself.

Grace begins here, but we have not the end yet. So Paul was blind three days, and his soul so wrought on that he could neither eat nor drink. Here Peter falls down at Jesus' knees. So with us: when brought really into His presence, there is the discovery of our sinfulness. The means used to bring us there may be various - circumstances of life, providential occurrences (with Luther, a thunder-storm). But when we are there, there is the revelation of Christ Himself, and wherever He is, He takes His right place in the soul. It is not only that a man then has salvation, but he cannot longer be content without God having His due place before him.

Peter does not fly away from the Lord, like Adam hiding himself: he is attracted to Him. At the same time he is there a judged, convicted, sinful man in his own conscience, which takes the part of Christ against itself. "Depart from me," he says, but he says it at Jesus' knees. This might seem like a contradiction. It was really love to the Lord and care for His honour, because His word had become the revelation of Christ to him. His heart has not perfect peace, but Christ has got possession of it. Grace draws to Christ, but there is withal the sense of unfitness till His work is known in all its peace-giving consequences. God sees the thoughts and intents of the heart, and we are made to see these as He sees them. Righteousness is planted in the conscience; God and man are brought together. It was not that Peter could be happy anywhere but at the knees of Jesus, but he felt all the while how unfit he was to be in such company.

60 But the Lord deals in perfect grace. He does not leave Simon Peter. He knew all his sin before He went into the ship, and says to him, "Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men." Jesus went into the ship to shew Peter that he had nothing to fear. Truly "perfect love casteth out fear." Fear has torment till grace is fully revealed; and now it was, with as much authority as that miracle-working word, "Let down your nets

for a draught." It was the word of Christ to his heart. If he trusted it for the fish, why not for his fears? Peter had said, "Depart," but instead of that, Christ had already come, knowing all he was better than Peter. He was come as a Saviour; nay, more, He intimates to Peter that He was going to make him an instrument in gathering others. Everyone who has the love of God shed abroad in his heart becomes a vessel of living grace himself: not the source, but the river flows through him, so that people may come and drink. Recipients of grace, we are associated with Christ in the activity of love. Outward gift is not meant here, but that, as members of His body, there is living fellowship with the Head in the testimony of His grace and power.

We see in these disciples the effect of all. They are absorbed with Christ now. They not only look to Him for salvation, but they think of nothing else for life, speaking now generally and apart from any particular failure. "They forsook all and followed him." Christ becomes their life. It is a new line altogether - not merely obedience to an express command, with the reserve of thinking and saying, perhaps, "there is no harm in this or that." Christ pleased not Himself. His reason for action was His Father's will, and not the absence of a prohibition. And we are sanctified unto the obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. "They forsook all," and where Christ went they went. They are associated with their Lord in His love to souls, and in the walk of life. This is liberty. May we, having Christ our life, have Him as our one motive! detached from all to Him, yet channels for all the blessing and grace we have ourselves tasted in Him! There is power to attract out of every corruption around, and to gather the soul into the thoughts and ways of God, by the revelation of Christ Himself.

61 Verse 12. Christ was the manifestation on earth of God's power and character - of grace. Of this the leper's case which follows is a striking witness; for leprosy was an evil which none but God could remove. But God was there in grace. Leprosy presented sin in the aspect of uncleanness. A man full of it on seeing Jesus, fell on his face, and besought Him, saying, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." There is the recognition of divine power in Jesus, but He has not full confidence in His grace. He seems disheartened by misery; and almost in despair says, "If thou wilt," etc. But He who alone on earth had the title so to say, says, "I will." It was God only - not in heaven, but come down in man and among men. Christ was there, who could touch the leper and the leprosy without being touched by it. Divine power was needed, doubtless, and the very priests could not but attest the results of its intervention, but there was divine and perfect love in His touch, while it was the touch of a man, a man who acknowledged the ordinances of God, as one who had been born under law. Thus this "turned for a testimony." For the leper must go to the priest, and what could he think? Why, who has been here? Jehovah must have been to heal the man.

Verse 16. And what next? Jesus "withdrew himself into the wilderness and prayed." Let the power exercised be ever so great, and manifestly divine, He is the dependent man; and this is just where we fail.

Verse 18. Here we have another thing - not the power of Satan, as in chapter 4, nor the uncleanness of sin, typified by leprosy, but the guilt of sin. They brought the man, because they felt the need; and there was the perseverance of faith, which would not be put off till another day. And Jesus brings forgiveness of sins, as well as cleansing from defilement. This is what appears in the instance of the palsied man. The first and grand point is that Jesus pronounces his sins forgiven. Authority to pardon was come in the Person of the Son of man on earth, whatever scribes and Pharisees might think. It was God, the Lord Jehovah, but the Son of man withal, having on earth power to forgive sins, and using it. It is in this way Israel is to be forgiven by-and-by (compare Psalm 103:3); and accordingly, the Lord here gives the proof of that authority to forgive by the healing the disease of the paralytic. "That ye may know," etc. (v. 14). The

man was to know in his relationship to God, that his guilt was gone. Through infinite grace, we are entitled to more than even this; for we have the righteousness of the accepted man in God's presence. We are made the righteousness of God in Him. This palsied man was a sample of what will be, in the future day, Israel's portion. Jesus was forgiving iniquities and healing diseases. He had shewn the power to do the one; now He would shew that He could do the other also. It is God's delight to do it all. You may not believe that you can have such a boon, but it is ours in Christ. The perfect Man has come with perfect title in His Person. God wrought there, but it was also as a man filled with the Holy Ghost. The believer walks, too, a proof not to himself so much as to others that God is there. The man ought not to say, "I wonder if I can walk"; if he has faith, he will get up and do it.

62 Two things are here present. First, the exceeding blessed grace that the Lord is come, the power of God within the sphere of human misery, which, extreme as it may be, does but make that power evident. If I look around as a man, I am lost. I cannot unriddle the history of the world - abominations committed in the name of Christ, Himself rejected by His people Israel, and crucified by those Gentiles to whom God had entrusted the government of the world, Mohammedanism, heathenism; what kind of a God have you, says the reasoning heart, when it is such a world! But here I have the Lord come down into all the wretchedness, sickness, sin; and my heart is drawn away from pleasure and sorrow to Him. How beautiful to see heart after heart brought around this One, the only true centre, soon to be the risen head of the new creation, Himself the object drawing out feelings and affections of which He alone is worthy; He who by His excellency, gives excellency, and by His gracious thoughts towards us produces and draws out gracious thoughts in us. Next, our hearts are fixed just so far as we have an object-fixed according to God, when we have Christ Himself before us. How can I love if I have nothing to love? A man is what he feels, and likes and thinks. If my soul lives and feeds upon that which is most excellent - Christ the bread of God, Christ becomes, in a practical sense, formed in the heart. In Him, the man Christ Jesus, God has had all His delight, and the display of it too.

Remark further, that in the accounts we have seen, divine power in the person of Jesus, the Son of man, is exercised in the midst of Israel. First, chapter 4:31-41, its triumph over the enemy's power in sicknesses and in demoniacal possessions, and the testimony of the kingdom, when all such effects of Satan's work should disappear. This last opens the way for the more positive and deeper blessing of souls, being put in relationship to God. Hence from chapter 5:1-26 (the call of Peter, the cleansing of the leper, and the pardon of the palsied man), it is a question of the state of the soul (whatever the outward accompaniments might be), of the authority of the word of the heart, of faith, and of Christ's personal glory. Still it was grace in operation towards Israel; grace, if one may so speak, in government. To Israel God had said that He would not put upon them the plagues of Egypt, save for their sin. They were an outwardly elect, redeemed people, but they were under God's government; and hence chastening came, of which the leprosy and the palsy were peculiar samples. Jesus shews Himself to be "Jehovah that healeth thee," in the midst of Israel, though He was passing away from them into a wider display of power and goodness. He could have healed every one, leprous or paralytic; He could have removed all the diseases, now, alas! brought on the Israelites; but in these cases it is where they come to Him in quest of healing, that is, it is in answer to faith that He works. He was there, shewing divine power and grace in healing.

63 Verse 27, etc. But this grace, being of God and sovereign, could not be bounded by human circumstances. Wherever a want appeared to Him, could He gainsay His power or His love? Now, see how that connects itself with what follows. There was full deliverance for all who trusted in Israel, but He could not, and would not limit His grace. The law limited, but when Himself, the God who gave it, came,

everybody who needs Him is welcome; His house is a house of prayer for all nations. Hence He calls a publican, a Jew indeed, but detested by the Israelites, and in a sense rightly, when viewed as the mark of their servitude nationally. A publican was one who profited by their Gentile masters, to extort money from Israel, and therefore naturally regarded with horror. But Jesus calls one named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom - calls him to be an apostle! Grace must act according to its own rights. If God has been good to you and me, does that hinder His mercy and love to another? Grace creates the instrument it wants to act by; and it will flow farther than the publican yet, even to the most distant Gentile. True, Israel had the promises, the Gentile, strictly speaking, had none; but for that very reason it was more purely grace; and grace would act towards the Gentiles. The Lord Himself, God, was there, and Israel could not be the centre, nor the temple, when He was there, the despised Lord of both. He is the door, the new centre and turning-point of blessing; not a mere branch of the old vine, but Himself the true vine. As a Jew, He was subject to ordinances, but as the Lord, He is above them, and He breaks out beyond all the old restrictions.

64 "Levi made him a great feast in his own house, and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them; but their scribes and Pharisees murmured." It was a terrible sight and blow to such. But Jesus answers, "They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." They mistook the Lord altogether: He came to shew how grace could deal with those who had no righteousness.

Verse 33, etc. He is now breaking, as it were, out of the old thing. He is faithful to Israel, but breaking up that order of things. How could they fast who owned the presence of the divine husband of Israel, the Messiah! The time was coming when the cross must be taken; but when the Bridegroom is there, fasting was out of place and season.

Verses 36-39. Further, the old garment cannot be patched with new cloth. Jesus would do no such thing as tack on Christianity to Judaism. Flesh and law go together, but grace and law, God's righteousness and man's, will never mix. Neither can the new wine, the power of the Spirit, be put into the old legal ordinances without loss on all sides. A man accustomed to forms, human arrangement, fathers' religion, etc., never likes the new principle and power of the kingdom; he says, The old is better. Such is nature; grace is offensive to it. Nor does man improve in divine things. He can degrade himself and give up what his heart never relished. And this goes on rapidly today.

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