

Commentary on Luke's Gospel

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SECTION 3 (5.1-9.50).

The Establishment And Expansion of Jesus' Messianic Ministry (5.1-9.50).

In this section we see the establishment and growth of Jesus' ministry as Messiah as He manifests Himself to Israel, and then how He goes about establishing the new Israel. This will be revealed as we go along, but note that central to it all is the proclamation of the Kingly Rule of God.

The whole may be analysed as follows:

- a Jesus calls Peter and John and appoints them as fishers of men (5.1-11).
- b An 'unclean' skin diseased man is cleansed and all are amazed, a picture of what Jesus has come to do for Israel (5.12-16).
- c The Messiah reveals His glory under a series of Old Testament pictures. As the Son of Man He has power to forgive sins, as God's Physician He has the ability to restore outcasts, as the Bridegroom He brings rejoicing to the people and as Son of Man He is Lord over the Sabbath. His glory shines out. The old has passed the new has come - it includes the Messianic healing of the paralysed man who is forgiven by the Son of Man - the door to faith as open to Levi and the outcasts through the Great Physician (The Messianic healer is here) - the joy that is present because of the coming of The Heavenly Bridegroom - the new authority of the One Who is Son of Man and is therefore also Lord of the Sabbath (5.17-6.11).
- d Jesus appoints His Apostles (6.12-19).
- e Jesus' declares God's blessings on the people of God, and woes on the rich and those who are highly thought of by men, followed by the new giving of the Law and general teaching (6.20-38).
- f Jesus' power is sent out to heal the centurion's servant (7.2-10).
- g The son of the widow of Nain is raised from the dead (7.11-17).
- h John the Baptist questions whether Jesus is the Messiah and is informed of the signs and wonders Jesus is doing so as to establish his faith - he is exalted by Jesus (7.18-35).
- i The sinful woman wipes His feet with her hair and kisses Him because she believes in Him, a picture of the response that should be Israel's, while the Pharisee's response is muted - the parable of the two Debtors (7.36-50).
- j Jesus proclaims His parables concerning the secrets of the Kingly Rule of God (8.1-18).
- i Jesus own mother, and his brothers, come to take Him away because they do not believe in him. They do not respond to Him (8.19-21).
- h Jesus as the Messiah quells the storm and delivers the demoniac (revealing His power over nature and evils spirits) establishing faith in His Apostles by signs and wonders (8.22-39).
- g The daughter of Jairus is raised from the dead (8.40-56).
- f Jesus' power is sent out through the twelve to preach and to heal (9.1-6).
- e The rich and powerful Herod is in doubt while the people of God are blessed at the sacramental meal where they receive His teaching (9.7-17).
- d His chosen Apostles, through Peter, confess Jesus as the Messiah (9.18-27).
- c The Messianic revelation is made at the Transfiguration where Jesus' glory shines

forth. He is God's Servant and the focus of the law and the prophets as represented by Moses and Elijah (9.28-36).

- b A demon possessed boy with an 'unclean' spirit is cleansed and all are amazed, a picture of the deliverance of Israel (9.37-43).
- a What the fishers of men must recognise and the position that they must take up. The Son of Man must die - he who is great shall be least - he who is not against them is for them (9.44-50).
- The section closes with 'For he who is not against you is for you' (9.50).

We note how in 'a' He calls Peter, James and John as fishers of men, and in the parallel makes clear the message that they must take out and the attitude that they must have. In 'b' a leper who is unclean is cleansed, and in the parallel a boy possessed by an unclean demon is cleansed, both pictures of what Jesus wants to do for Israel. In 'c' the Son of Man is revealed as what He is and in the parallel Jesus is revealed as what He is. In 'd' He appoints His Apostles, and in the parallel they recognise Him for what He is. In 'e' we have blessings on the people of God and woes on the rich and important, and in the parable we have the rich and important Herod in grave doubt and the people of God blessed at the sacramental meal, a meal which symbolises the future blessing. In 'f' His word and power are sent forth to heal the centurion's son at a distance, and in the parallel the Apostles are sent forth with His word and power, and through them He heals at a distance. In 'g' the son of the widow of Nain is raised from the dead and in the parallel the daughter of Jairus is raised from the dead (another man/woman parallel). In 'h' John is told of the signs and wonders that Jesus is doing and in the parallel Jesus does signs and wonders so as to encourage the disciples. In 'i' the outcast sinful woman wipes His feet with her hair and her tears because of her love for Him and comes in, and in the parallel Mary, with her family, come to take Him because they do not believe in Him and remain outside. In 'j', central to it all, is the proclamation of the Kingly Rule of God.

The section can now be divided into four parts.

1). Jesus Has Come As The Fulfiller Of Old Testament Promises (5.1-6.19).

In the first part of the section incidents are described which bring out how Jesus is the One Who fulfils in Himself the Old Testament promises (5.1-6.19).

- a He calls the three and is the One Who sends out fishermen to fish for God's people in the last days (Jeremiah 16.16).
 - b He heals a skin diseased person as Elisha did (2 Kings 5) - a picture of His cleansing of men's lives.
 - c He is the Son of Man Who forgives men's sins.
 - d He eats and drinks with 'sinners' and is the Great Physician Who makes men whole (compare Jeremiah 8.22).
 - e He is the Bridegroom Who has come for His bride (Isaiah 62.5).
 - d He brings new clothing and new wine for His people.
 - c He is the Son of Man, the One like David, Who is Lord of the Sabbath.
 - b He heals a man with a withered hand - a picture of the restoration of the withered Vine to fruitfulness and of the withered bones of Israel to life.
 - a He calls His Apostles - the twelve - establishing the foundation of the New Israel - and with them alongside He preaches and heals .
- 2). The Foundation Of The New Israel Under The Kingly Rule of God (6.20-8.18).

In the second part of the section (6.20-8.18), He reveals Himself as the founder of the new Israel under the Kingly Rule of God:

- a He proclaims the new Law of the Kingly Rule of God (6.20-49).
- b He sends out His power to the Gentiles, to those who are seen as unclean, but who have believed. They too are to benefit from His Kingly Rule (7.1-10).

- c He raises the dead, a foretaste of the resurrection, revealing Him as ‘the Lord’. The Kingly Rule of God is here (7.11-17).
- d John’s disciples come to ‘the Lord’ enquiring on behalf of John, and He points to His signs and wonders as evidence that He is the promised One. The King is present to heal and proclaim the Good News of the Kingly Rule of God (7.18-23).
- c He exalts, yet also sets in his rightful place, John the Baptist as the greatest of the prophets and points beyond him to the new Kingly Rule of God, emphasising again that the Kingly Rule of God is here (7.24-35).
- b He is greeted by the transformed prostitute, who has believed, a picture of restored Israel (Ezekiel 16.59-63) and of the fact that the Kingly Rule of God is available to all Who seek Him and hear Him.
- a He proclaims the parables of the Kingly Rule of God (8.1-18).

3). Jesus is Revealed As The Messiah Come With Power (8.19-9.36).

In the third part of the section He is Revealed as the glorious Messiah Who has come with power (8.19-9.36):

- a He no longer owns responsibility to His own family who do not believe in Him, and are on the outside (earth does not recognise Him) (8.19-21).
- b He is revealed as the One Who is from above by quelling the storm, revealing His power over nature (8.22-25).
- c He delivers the demoniac of a legion of demons, revealing His power over the spirit world (8.26-39).
- d He raises the dead, revealing His power over death (8.30-56).
- c He sends out His power to preach and to heal through the twelve, with power over all demons (9.1-10).
- b He is revealed as the One Who is from above by providing a miraculous sacramental meal, revealing His power over nature (9.11-17).
- a He is confessed as Messiah by His followers, and by being transfigured before them revealing Who His true Father is (9.18-36).

4). Jesus Commences The Training of His Disciples (9.37-50).

In the final part He commences the training for those who must take over His work (9.37-50).

- a They are unable to cast out demons and through a demon possessed boy they learn their own weakness (9.37-43a).
- b They learn that the Son of Man must be humbled under the hands of men but did not understand (9.43b-45).
- b They learn that they too must not seek greatness, and must receive little children in His name, because he who is least is greatest (9.46-48).
- a They forbid one who casts out demons’ in Jesus name and learn the lesson that he who is not against them is with them (9.49-50).

These are vital lessons for the future.

JESUS HAS COME AS THE ONE WHO WILL FULFIL THE OLD TESTAMENT PROMISES (5.1-6.19).

The promise of One Who would come ‘in the last days’ is prominent in the Old Testament under various descriptions, Prophet (Deuteronomy 18.15; Isaiah 61.1), Greater David (Isaiah 9.6-7; 11.1-4; Ezekiel 37.24-28; Daniel 7.13-14; and often), Servant of the Lord (Isaiah 42.1-6; 49.1-6; 50.3-8; 52.13-53.12). But Jesus here calls also on other ideas which in the Old Testament applied to God, but which He applies to Himself. It is a half-hidden revelation of Deity.

- a He calls the three, Peter, James and John, and is the One Who sends out fishermen to

- fish for God's people in the last days (Jeremiah 16.16).
- b He heals a skin diseased person as Elisha did (2 Kings 5)- a picture of His cleansing of men's lives.
- c He is the Son of Man (Daniel 9.13-14) Who forgives men's sins.
- d He eats and drinks with 'sinners' and is the Great Physician Who makes men whole (compare Jeremiah 8.22).
- e He is the Bridegroom Who has come for His bride (Isaiah 62.5).
- d He brings new clothing (Zechariah 3.4-5 compare Matthew 22.11-12) and new wine (Isaiah 25.6 compare John 2.1-11) for His people.
- c He is the Son of Man (Daniel 9.13-14), the One like David, Who is Lord of the Sabbath.
- b He heals a man with a withered hand - a picture of the restoration of fruitfulness (Ezekiel 17.24) and of life (Ezekiel 37.2, 4) to His new people.
- a He calls His Apostles - the twelve - establishing the foundation of the New Israel - and with them alongside He preaches and heals .

Chapter 5. Jesus Reveals His Authority In Various Ways

In this chapter Jesus reveals His power and authority, first in His calling of some of His disciples for a life long commitment; then by cleansing a skin diseased man, by touching him and remaining clean; by forgiving the sins of a paralytic as the Son of Man; by His calling of outcasts as The Physician; and finally by declaring that His disciples cannot fast because the promised Bridegroom is with them. This idea of revealing His authority and power continues into chapter 6.

Jesus Reveals His Authority Over Both Fish and Fishermen and Calls the Fishermen To Fish Men (5.1-11).

The first incident in which Jesus' Messianic authority is revealed is in the calling of fishermen to follow Him in lifetime commitment, with no offer of earthly reward, for the purpose of 'taking men alive'. This will fulfil the prophecy of Jeremiah 16.16 concerning the last days. 'Behold I will send for many fishermen, says the Lord, and they will fish them', but it is also evidence of Jesus' supreme authority to call men at His bidding.

The words of Jeremiah did primarily have judgment in mind, but always when God judged men were also won to righteousness. And these Apostles too will, even while taking men alive for Christ, be the cause of judgment on those who refuse.

The story here parallels the calling of the four, Peter, Andrew, James and John in Mark 1.16-20; Matthew 4.18-22 to be disciples. These were men who were already acquainted with Him and had been disciples of John the Baptist (John 1.35-42). They had probably accompanied Him back to Galilee. But He had not at that stage called them to follow Him. There the incident is in a slightly different order, coming before the healing of Peter's mother-in-law, and is more abbreviated. But this merely brings out that the Gospels are not intended to be in strict chronological order. Their order is determined by how will best present the ideas that they want to present. Had Luke had it earlier it would have spoiled the pattern of chapter 4.

Only Luke tells us about the remarkable incident of the fishes. Mark had wanted to concentrate on the authority that Jesus was revealing, and Matthew follows Mark. But Luke not only wants to bring that out, but also wants to bring out His power over nature and His fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy. The gathering of the scattered children of Israel were to be gathered by 'fishermen' fishing for them (Jeremiah 16.16). Thus He will act to cause the 'taking of men alive' by fishermen, revealing Himself again as the introducer of the last days, for His disciples were being called in order to carry out God's purposes for the last days. It could well be that Peter did not want to broadcast this story, which he might have seen as

glorifying himself and suggesting that he was superior to others, which would explain why Mark did not know of it. Luke appears to have obtained the details from a local (who calls the Lake Gennesaret).

The passage may be analysed as follows:

- a Now it came about, while the multitude pressed on him and heard the word of God, that he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret (1).
- b And he saw two boats standing by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them, and were washing their nets (2).
- c And he entered into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the multitudes out of the boat (3).
- d And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught" (4).
- e And Simon answered and said, "Master, we toiled all night, and took nothing: but at (on the strength of) your word I will let down the nets" (5).
- f And when they had done this, they enclosed a great multitude of fishes, and their nets were breaking (6).
- e And they beckoned to those associated with them in the other boat, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink (7).
- d But Simon Peter, when he saw it, fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (8).
- c For he was amazed, and all who were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken, and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon (9-10a).
- b And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be overawed, from now on you will be taking men alive" (10b).
- a And when they had brought their boats to land, they left all, and followed him (11).

Note that in 'a' the crowds were pressing Him on the land to hear the word of God, and in the parallel the disciples also come to the land to follow Him. In 'b' they had ceased fishing and were washing their nets despondently because fishing had failed them, and in the parallel they are to rather have the replacement joy of taking men alive. In 'c' they obey Jesus and do His will, and in the parallel they are amazed at the reward that they receive. In 'd' they are commanded to launch out into the deep and let down their nets, and in the parallel Peter has launched so deep that what has happened as a result of obeying Jesus makes him stricken with guilt over his sinfulness. In 'e' they have caught nothing, and in the parallel have caught so much that they have to call for their associates. And central to all is that when they obeyed Jesus they enclosed a great multitude of fish.

5.1 'Now it came about, while the multitude pressed on him and heard the word of God, that he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret.'

The crowds continued to gather around Jesus in order to hear 'the word of God', the truth of God taught by Jesus, as He was standing by the lake of Gennesaret. They were so eager that they were pressing in on Him and making it difficult for Him to speak in comfort and safety.

Gennesaret was a region south of Capernaum whose name had become attached to the Sea of Galilee. The lake is known as Gennesaret in outside sources, and is seven miles (eleven kilometres) wide and thirteen miles (twenty one kilometres) long. It is liable to sudden storms because of the wind swirling through the surrounding hills, and is six hundred feet (211 metres) below sea level, being bountifully supplied with fish, and in Jesus' day its shores were dotted with towns.

The crowds had gathered to hear 'the word of God.' The spreading of this word, and its

effectiveness, is a theme of Luke and Acts. It is the word concerning the Kingly Rule of God and in Acts includes the proclamation of the name of Jesus Christ. The popularity of it among the ordinary people is brought out here.

‘Gennesaret.’ The lake is called that only here in the New Testament. It suggests that Luke obtained this story from a local who thought of the Lake in those terms. Peter, James and John clearly did not see it as a story to be spread around. They would think that it could only fully be appreciated by fishermen, and by recounting it they may have thought that they would be seen as putting themselves in a position of superiority to those whose calls were less spectacular.

5.2 ‘And he saw two boats standing by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them, and were washing their nets.’

So with the crowds pressing Him so hard Jesus looked around Him and saw two boats moored by the shore, but they were empty, for the fishermen had disembarked and some were washing and mending their nets (diktau), while others were fishing from the shore with casting nets (amphibleston). The owners were in partnership together and had a satisfactory little business. But on this particular day they were not happy men. They and their crews had fished all night and had caught nothing. Jesus, however recognised that He knew them. He had met them when they were disciples of John the Baptist and He and they had come back to Galilee together.

The fruitlessness of their mission is reflected in Mark where we are told that they were casting their nets. These were casting nets which were used from the shore by someone standing in the water. Thus it would appear that while some were washing the main nets (drag nets) and mending them, others of the group were trying vainly to see if they could catch anything to make up for their bad night and for what they had failed to catch with their drag nets at sea. They did not want to return home totally empty. It is a sad picture of a group of weary and forlorn men who have had a hard time. Mark and Luke simply bring out different aspects of the incident in the same way as two newspaper reporters might.

5.3 ‘And he entered into one of the boats, which was Simon’s, and asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the multitudes out of the boat.’

So He boldly walked over and boarded Simon Peter’s boat, and called to him and asked him to launch the boat a little away from the land so that He could preach from it. He would have known that it was a bit of an imposition on these hardworking men, but He was testing them out. Had they refused, or even shown reluctance, He might simply have passed them by. If they were to follow Him they would need guts. Then when Simon Peter had proved himself and had done what He asked, He sat down in the boat and taught the crowds from it.

5.4 ‘And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught.” ’

Then when He had finished preaching He turned to Simon Peter and said, “Put out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught.” The prophetic command probably made Peter give a grim smile, and give his partner a look. No one knew better than they that there were no fish to be had. If they could not be found at night when it was dark, this time of the morning when the sun was shining on the water would be hopeless. But his calibre is revealed in his obedience to the Prophet. If He told him to do something, then he would do it. It could do no harm even though they were very tired, and it would please Him, and possibly teach Him a lesson about fish.

5.5 ‘And Simon answered and said, “Master, we toiled all night, and took nothing: but at (on the strength of) your word I will let down the nets.” ’

He gives the hint to Jesus that it is really a waste of time. As experienced fishermen they have

tried and failed, nevertheless if He really wants them to, he will do it. 'Master, we have been fishing all night, and it has been hard toil, and I am very tired, and we have caught nothing, but if you tell me to, then I will do what you say. I will again throw out the nets.' It was the response of a godly man to a revered teacher. He politely refrained from pointing out that one just did not fish at that time of day with the hope of catching anything substantial.

'Master' is a favourite word of Luke for when the disciples address Jesus. He sees it as the best word to use for his Greek readers to explain 'Rabbi' and 'Teacher', although he uses 'Teacher' when Jesus is being addressed by non-disciples.

Note the use of 'word'. Peter recognised that hopeless as it might be this was a prophetic word that he must obey.

5.6 'And when they had done this, they enclosed a great multitude of fishes, and their nets were breaking,'

We are probably intended to see that Peter was expecting nothing. He was a skilled fisherman, and he knew his fish. But he also respected Jesus and so he and Andrew, with their men, did as He bade them. And it was then that to their utter astonishment they discovered that their nets were so full that they were breaking, although not to a point where they lost many fish. It seemed incredible. They had taken a great multitude of fish.

No explanation is given. But we are left with the impression that it was out of the ordinary, either by prophetic insight or by a divine herding of fish.

5.7 'And they beckoned to those associated with them in the other boat, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink.'

Excitedly they beckoned to those associated with them in the other boat, James and John and their crew, for them to come and help them, and when they came they filled both boats to the brim until the gunwales were almost under water. They had never carried so much fish before. 'Began to sink' is not to be taken too literally. The point is that they were so low in the water because of the huge amount of fish that they seemed to be in danger of sinking. But they were far too capable to actually allow the boats to sink.

5.8 'But Simon Peter, when he saw it, fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." '

And then Simon Peter looked down on what had happened and the realisation of the enormity of it burst on him. He had seen Jesus perform miracles before, but this was beyond anything that he could have imagined. He knew perfectly well that there should have been no fish there. It thus revealed that this Prophet could call fish to His bidding, that in some way He was Lord over nature. And because he was a good man, and a godly man, he was overawed. He realised that he was in the presence not only of a Prophet, but of more than a Prophet. Somehow God was here. And recognising it he was filled with a deep conviction of sin and unworthiness.

And without thinking (typically of Peter) he fell down before Jesus among the fish and cried out, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." It was not a statement to be analysed too closely. Nor was it a thought out phrase. Nor did he really want Jesus to go. Rather it was a compulsive expression of veneration and an indication of the sense that he had that he was not worthy to be close to Jesus. He was declaring, as John the Baptist had before him, that he was not worthy to be in Jesus' presence. (He did not really expect Jesus to leave the boat and it is pedantic to think otherwise).

'Fell down at Jesus' knees.' Probably literally. Both would be knee deep in fish. It is the description of an eyewitness who remembered it vividly.

'For I am a sinful man, O Lord.' Peter had heard Jesus preaching, he was in awe of Him as a prophet, and no doubt Jesus' previous teaching had made him more aware of his sinfulness.

But now this extraordinary event brought it all home to him in renewed power. He was in the presence of he knew not what and it made his consciousness of his sin bubble over. He knew that he was not even worthy to be in the same boat with Him. All the workings of his conscience in the last few weeks had come home to roost. he recognised that he needed forgiveness and mercy.

We see in what happened here Jesus' knowledge of men. No other sign would have made the same impression as this one. For fish were Peter's life. And as a result of it he belonged to Jesus for ever.

'Simon Peter.' Only here in Luke (regularly in John). It is probably intended by Luke to indicate the moment when Simon became Peter in spirit, as he recognised that Jesus was even more out of the ordinary than he had realised. From this moment on he was Jesus' man.

'O Lord.' Here this does not mean just 'Sir'. It is a title of reverence to someone who has been revealed as something beyond what he had previously thought, and for Whom anything less seemed inappropriate.

5.9-10a 'For he was amazed, and all who were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken, and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon.'

Luke then explains the reason for Peter's words. It was because he, and all who were with him, together with their partners James and John in the other boat, were filled with astonishment at this amazing happening. They all had many years of fishing experience behind them, but they had never seen anything like this. (The reversion to 'Simon' adds emphasis to the inclusion of Peter in the previous verse).

We note all through how skilfully Luke keeps the attention on Simon Peter, while bringing in others when necessary, and cleverly introducing James and John so that they can be involved in the call, and yet without taking the attention off Simon Peter.

5.10b 'And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be overawed, from now on you will be taking men alive." '

And Jesus then gently said to Simon Peter. "Do not be overawed, from now on you will be taking men alive." It was His call to Peter to follow Him, and both knew it, just as both knew that Peter had had a life-changing experience. And it was an illustration of the fact that his future life was to be involved in 'netting' men. He was to be a 'winner of souls'. In the other Gospels the call is put more blatantly, 'Follow Me.' Both were surely said, for in neither case do we have the full conversations. From now on Jesus was going to train Peter to be a preacher, a catcher of men. And for Peter and the others life would never be the same again.

As we have already seen the picture of men of God as fishermen is found in the Old Testament. The scattered children of Israel were to be gathered by 'fishermen' fishing them (Jeremiah 16.16). No wonder Jesus chose fishermen. They were skilled at it.

5.11 'And when they had brought their boats to land, they left all, and followed him.'

Notice the 'they'. It caters for Andrew, James and John as well. Together they left their boats with the servants, and followed Jesus. From now on they would go where He went, learning from Him and preparing to be proclaimers of His word. We are intended to see that they turned their backs on the greatest catch of fish that they had ever made without even a thought. They left all and followed Him. So it must be if we would follow Jesus.

What Jesus had done had paradoxically done by producing an abundance of fish was to make clear to them that there was more that they could do with their lives than be fishermen. They could go with this Prophet and serve God, which was better than a whole multitude of fish. And so they responded to His quiet word of Messianic authority and followed Him.

(The servants would take the fish to the homes of Peter, James and John and explain what had happened, and they would no doubt carry on the fishing business on behalf of the families, but that was not Luke's interest. As for the three (or four), they would, of course, be able to return to their homes now and again while they were in the area. But they had received a permanent call from which they could not draw back. Although later, after the resurrection, Peter would take his wife with him - 1 Corinthians 9.5).

Note on the Connection of This Passage With John 21.

As we might expect many scholars, who cannot bear to have things happen twice in life, and for whom every day is totally different, see this story as simply being the same as John 21 under a different guise. But there are no real grounds for doing so. The similarities are mainly those which naturally arise when men go fishing, and the differences are many and varied. It is true that there is a similar 'miracle, but that is the only parallel apart from the obvious. And what is much more likely than it being a duplication is that Jesus planned what He did in John 21 as a reminder to Peter of this life-changing moment at his call. It was an indication that his call still held, and that He still had plenty of 'taking men alive' for him to do. End of note.

The Cleansing of A Skin Diseased Man (5.12-16).

The cleansing of a skin diseased man by touching him is something that would have affected the ancient mind like little else. It indicated a mastery over disease and uncleanness that was unique. Skin disease was held in horror by all, and skin diseased men and women were to be avoided. They were expected to avoid human company, except for their own kind, and to call 'unclean, unclean' so as to warn people to keep away from them (Leviticus 13.43-46). For in Jewish Law skin disease rendered them permanently ritually unclean. They could neither live among men nor approach the Dwellingplace of God. And any who came in contact with them became 'unclean' and unable to enter the temple until they again became clean.

It is no accident that in Luke this story follows the cry of Peter, 'Depart from me for I am a sinful man, O Lord', and precedes the one in which Jesus declares that a man's sins are forgiven, for it illustrates that He could also make Peter 'clean', and can truly forgive sins.

There are a number of indications in the Old Testament that Israel were seen as the equivalent of skin diseased persons. Isaiah could cry out, 'We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags' (Isaiah 64.6), a typical picture of a skin diseased person, and some have seen in the Servant of Isaiah 53 the picture of a skin diseased person as He bore the sin of others. Moreover the picture in Isaiah 1.5-6 of Israel as covered with festering sores could well have been of a skin diseased person. And the worst fate that could befall a man who usurped the privileges of God's sanctuary was to be stricken with skin disease (2 Chronicles 16.16-21). Never again could he enter the Temple of the Lord. So like the skin diseased man, Israel were unclean before God (Haggai 2.14), although in Haggai it is by contact with death. However, being skin diseased was seen as a living death, so the thoughts are parallel. Thus a skin diseased man was a fit depiction of Israel's need.

In contrast Jesus was conscious of His own superlative purity. He was master over uncleanness, it could not survive His touch, nor could He be defiled by it. Thus when a skin diseased man approaches Jesus for healing we may well see behind it the intention of also depicting Israel in its need, a need which can only be healed by the Messiah. Compare 7.22 where the cleansing of the skin diseased is a sign of the presence of the Messiah.

There may also be intended a reminder of the fact that a greater than Elisha was here. Elisha had enabled the healing of a skin diseased man (2 Kings 5), but he had not touched him. Rather he had sent him to wash seven times in the Jordan. He had put him firmly in the hands of God, and God had healed him. But here Jesus had taken it on Himself. It was He Who had healed him. The implication could be drawn by the reader.

We may analyse this passage as follows:

- **a While He was in one of the cities (12a).**
- **b Behold, a man full of skin disease, and when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face (12b).**
- **c And besought him, saying, “Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.” (12c).**
- **d And he stretched out his hand, and touched him, saying, “I will, be you made clean.” And immediately the leprosy left him (13).**
- **c And he charged him to tell no man: “But go your way, and show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a testimony to them” (14).**
- **b But so much the more went abroad the report concerning him, and great crowds came together to hear, and to be healed of their infirmities (15).**
- **a But he withdrew himself in the deserts, and prayed (16).**

In ‘a’ Jesus is in ‘one of the cities’ where He can meet with man. In the parallel He is in the deserts where He could meet with God. In ‘b’ the skin diseased man comes to Jesus, and in the parallel the crowds with infirmities come to Jesus. In ‘c’ the man pleads to be made clean and in the parallel he is to go to the priests because he is clean. And central to it all is that it was Jesus Who had made him clean.

5.12 ‘And it came about, while he was in one of the cities, behold, a man full of skin disease, and when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face, and besought him, saying, “Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.”’

All background information is suppressed in order to focus entirely on the man and his condition, although Luke probably expects us to recognise that we are still near the Lake of Gennesaret. (It may also have been in order to prevent embarrassment to a well known figure. The man was still open to rebuke for having ventured into the city while ritually unclean). He was ‘full of skin disease’, a clearly severe case. (‘Full = pleres, a term regularly used by medical men to describe the progress of a disease). And now he was meeting someone Who was ‘full of the Holy Spirit’ (4.1). As being unclean he was not supposed to approach anyone, least of all a prophet of Israel in Whom was the Holy Spirit. But when he saw Jesus, concerning Whom he had heard so much, he fell on his face before Him. In his heart he knew that this man could help him.

And he begged Him saying, ‘Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.’ His doubt was not whether He could do it, but whether He would. For many turned away from him in disgust when they saw him. It was a cry of faith, and yet of anguish.

Notice his desire, to be made ‘clean’. This is the thing above all that hurt him so deeply, not so much the dreadful disfigurement, but being unable to approach God’s house and being unable to be in contact with fellow human beings.

5.13 ‘And he stretched out his hand, and touched him, saying, “I will, be you made clean.” And immediately the skin disease left him.’

But Jesus had come in order to help those whom other people found disgusting, and to the man’s total surprise, He reached out His hand and touched him. It was the first time he had been touched for a long time, and the last thing that he had expected. Men normally turned away from him with a shudder. For to touch a skin diseased man like himself was for the person in question also to be rendered ritually unclean. No Pharisee would have come within a mile of him if he could help it. But then there was nothing that he could do about his condition. He was powerless to help him. But Jesus deliberately chose to touch him. He could have healed him at a word. Why then did He touch him? It was a gesture of supreme religious authority. By this Jesus revealed His conscious superiority to all disease and uncleanness. By it He was claiming that He could not be rendered unclean by His contact with the skin-diseased man because He was the source of all cleanness. He was saying that He was the One Who was

so pure that His purity countered any uncleanness. In any other the claim would immediately have been dismissed. But what was to be said of a case where the disease simply disappeared before their eyes?

Jesus then added, 'I will. Be clean.' It was Jesus' will that he be made clean. And immediately he was healed, for immediately the skin disease was cured. It 'left him'. Nor was Jesus rendered unclean. His purity had counteracted any uncleanness. And the man was no longer skin diseased, he would no longer render others unclean by contact with him. And who could charge with uncleanness the One Who had healed him? In this too was a picture of what Jesus had come to do for Israel. He wanted as the Messiah to make them clean. He would 'bear their griefs and carry their sorrows', (Isaiah 52.3) being afflicted for their sakes that they might be healed. Only God could so rise over uncleanness.

There are many examples in the Old Testament of God's promise that He would make men clean, although they are not specifically related to skin disease. 'I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols will I cleanse you, a new heart I will give you, and a new Spirit will I put within you, and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone, and will give you a heart of flesh.' (Ezekiel 36.25-26, compare Leviticus 14.7 where sprinkling of blood is used with regard to skin diseases). 'On that day there will be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness' (Zechariah 13.1). At least one member of the house of David had been stricken with skin disease (2 Kings 15.5).

5.14 'And he charged him to tell no man: "But go your way, and show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a testimony to them.'

Then Jesus bade him not to tell anyone, but to obey the Law of Moses and go on his way to the Temple in Jerusalem, and show himself to a priest, who would be able to examine him and pass his verdict on whether his skin disease was cleansed. Then he must make the usual offerings as a testimony to the priests of what God had done.

The command not to tell anyone was in order to prevent him in his excitement from contacting others and thus rendering them ritually unclean, for until he had received a certificate from the priests he was still officially unclean. It may also have been in order to prevent people coming to see Jesus as a spectacle, and in order to stress that it was primarily not in order to heal that He had come. He wanted people to come to Him out of hunger for the word. And while people continued to flock to Him He found it very difficult to find quiet places where He could meet with His Father.

'A testimony to them.' This demonstrates that his silence was to endure only until he came to the priest. And he would inform the priest how it had happened and who had done it. And the priesthood would be made aware of the activities of Jesus and how He was making sick people whole. But the 'testimony' in mind was to both to priests and people. The offering of the sacrifices would be witness to the fact that the man was clean. It made clear that he had been officially passed as clean. But Luke may have intended the double entendre. The man's very healing was a witness of what Jesus had come to do, bear the sin and uncleanness of man.

Note On What Was Involved Before The Priests.

A man who claimed to be healed of a disfiguring skin disease had to go and show himself to the priests in Jerusalem and then offer the appropriate sacrifices. Once he had been examined and declared free of the disease, two birds were taken, and one was killed over running water. Then cedar, scarlet and hyssop, with the living bird, were dipped in the blood of the dead bird and he was sprinkled with the blood seven times and pronounced clean. Then the live bird was allowed to go free. The man then washed himself and his clothes and shaved himself.

Seven days later he was re-examined. He then had to shave his head, hair, beard and

eyebrows, and bring an offering of two male lambs without blemish and one ewe lamb (less for a poor person), with three tenths parts of fine flour for a meal offering, mingled with oil, and one log of oil. The priest then offered one he-lamb as a guilt offering, together with the log of oil, and waved them as a wave offering before the Lord to make atonement for him. The other two were offered as a sin offering and a burnt offering. The restored person was then touched on the tip of the right ear, the right thumb and the right great toe with blood from the guilt offering and, after the oil had been sprinkled seven times before the Lord, with oil. The remainder of the oil was then put on his head. Thus was atonement made for him. Then he was finally examined and, if he was clear of the disease, was given a certificate that he was clean and allowed to go. See for all this Leviticus 14.

End of note.

It should be noted that we have in this passage a demonstration of Jesus' loyalty to the Law, and that this comes prior to a number of cases where He is challenged concerning His loyalty to the Law. He has already established His bona fides.

5.15 'But so much the more went abroad the report concerning him, and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed of their infirmities.'

But in the face of such an event the publicity was unavoidable. News about Him spread even more, and great crowds came to Him to hear Him, and to be healed from their sicknesses and diseases.

5.16 'But he withdrew himself in the deserts, and prayed.'

While walking in the towns and cities (verse 12) Jesus was constantly open to approaches by needy people, and this made it all the more necessary that at times He withdraw into desert places to meet with His Father (compare 6.12; 9.18, 28; 11.1; 22.32). He may have been withdrawing from the effects of the new success, but whatever the reason it was an indication that He needed these times of resuscitation in the presence of God.

Jesus Is The Son of Man Who Can Forgive Sins (5.17-26).

We now commence here a series of five incidents which can be paralleled in Mark, from where Luke probably gained most of his knowledge about them (5.17-6.11). Each except the last, which speaks for itself, depicts Jesus as a fulfilment of Old Testament promises. He is the Son of Man, He is the Bridegroom, He is the Great Physician, He is the Greater than David, He is Lord of the Sabbath. It is thus made clear that He is the Coming One.

In these passages also we find the first beginnings of the antagonism towards Jesus which was aroused among certain Pharisees, and the Rabbis (teachers of the Law of Moses) that they called in to assist them. They call His assurance to the paralytic, that his sins are forgiven, blasphemy. They harshly criticise eating with 'public servants' (tax-collectors) and 'sinners' (those who do not follow Pharisaic teaching in respect of ritual requirements), an attack on Jesus' position concerning ritual cleanliness. They attack the failure of His disciples to fast. They condemn His attitude to the Sabbath. They criticise His healing on the Sabbath. And as their criticism expands, so does their determination to do away with Him.

Those who openly opposed Jesus were not on the whole the cream of such men, which is why our picture of them is slightly distorted. For those who tailed Jesus tended to be the ones that were more extreme and rigidly minded. The Pharisees followed a strict interpretation of the Law but were very influential, with some being more flexible than others. Even though there were only a few thousand of them they had a strong influence in the synagogues, and were highly respected because of their religious zeal. They believed in the resurrection of the dead, and in angels, and saw both the Law and the Prophets as Scripture. They also held fast to the teachings of the elders, a kind of oral tradition dealing with the detailed interpretation of the Law (and it was very detailed), which they stressed that all men should live by. They were

very strict about ritual cleanliness and keeping the Sabbath; were strict and particular on tithing; and in order to ensure cleanness themselves engaged in a multiplicity of ‘washings’. The problem was that in their zeal they became too fastidious and too demanding. And the more particular they became the worse they got. They tended to believe that only they were right, seeing their traditions as being as authoritative as Scripture. They believed that if only they were sufficiently obedient to the covenant God would bless Israel. Thus they took their eyes off God and fixed them on their own laws. That is always the danger with rules.

In this first passage we are introduced for the first time in Luke to Jesus’ description of Himself as ‘the Son of Man’. The same title will also occur in 6.5. In both cases it is a title which depicts divine authority. As Son of Man He has authority on earth to forgive sins. As Son of Man He is Lord of the Sabbath.

Later the title bears four distinct emphases, the one is that the Son of Man must suffer and die and rise again (9.22, 44; 17.22; 22.22; 24.7), the second is that He is here to live as a true man among men (7.34; 9.58), the third is that He has come to seek and save the lost (9.56; 19.10), and the fourth that He will be exalted and that one day He will return to this earth in power and glory (9.26; 12.8, 40; 17.24, 26, 30; 18.8; 21.27, 36; 22.69).

The title Son of Man was Jesus’ favourite title for Himself. It was ideal for His purpose. It could depict one who was lowly, a ‘son of man’ who lived for God as a man among men, and who would have to face suffering and death, but it could also depict One who would rise again, becoming the glorious figure who had come to God on the clouds of Heaven to receive dominion and glory and a kingdom, in other words to receive authority from God (Daniel 7.13-14), the very essence of Messiahship.

Here then in the current passage we are brought face to face with the authority of the Son of Man, which is here the authority on earth to declare that men’s sins have been forgiven.

We may analyse this passage as follows:

- a He was teaching, and there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by, who were come out of every village of Galilee and Judaea and Jerusalem, and the power of the Lord was with Him to heal (17).
- b Men bring on a bed a man who was paralysed, and they sought to bring him in, and to lay him before Him. Not finding by what way they might bring him in because of the crowd, they went up to the housetop, and let him down through the tiles, with his couch, into the midst before Jesus (18-19).
- c Seeing their faith, He said, “Man, your sins are forgiven you.” (20).
- d The scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, “Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?” (21).
- e Jesus perceiving their reasonings, answered (22a).
- d And He said to them, “Why do you reason in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you’, or to say, ‘Arise and walk?’ ” (22b-23).
- c ‘But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins (He said to him who was paralysed), “I say to you, Arise, and take up your couch, and go to your house.” (24).
- b Immediately he rose up before them, and took up that on which he lay, and departed to his house, glorifying God (25).
- a Amazement took hold on all, and they glorified God, and they were filled with awe, saying, “We have seen strange things today” (26).

Note that in ‘a’ He was teaching (and was being watched by the Pharisees and Rabbis) and the power of the Lord was present to heal, while in the parallel all who gathered to here Him were amazed at what they saw. In ‘b’ they bring a man in lying on his litter, and in the parallel the man stands up healed. In ‘c’ Jesus declares his sins forgiven, and in the parallel H shows that

it is so by telling him to rise and walk. In 'd' He is faced with the opposition of the Pharisees concerning forgiving sins and in the parallel He replies with a counter argument concerning forgiving sins. Centrally in 'e' Jesus has an answer for the Pharisees and scribes.

5.17 'And it came about on one of those days, that he was teaching, and there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by, who were come out of every village of Galilee and Judaea and Jerusalem, and the power of the Lord was with him to heal.'

After a vague time note, omitting the mention of Capernaum (which demonstrates that he is not over concerned to mention place names, not that he does not know them), Luke now introduces us to Jesus as He teaches. From what follows He was clearly seated within a house looking out through the open door. Like being in the boat earlier it would prevent the crowds from pressing Him. Nearby, observing Him, were Pharisees and Doctors of the Law (Rabbis). They had come as self-appointed judges to check Him out, 'from every village of Galilee, and Judaea and Jerusalem'. This did not necessarily mean that every village in Galilee contained at least one Pharisee, but that all villages that did have Pharisees in them were represented. They had clearly decided that it was important for them all to be here. Some also came from Judaea and Jerusalem. (This is the most likely reading and best attested. Other readings suggest that it is the crowds who were from out of 'every village of Galilee, and from Judaea and from Jerusalem'). By now His fame had spread far and wide and even Judaea and Jerusalem were interested.

'And the power of the Lord was with Him to heal.' This suggests that a number of healings had already taken place. But it would be specially relevant in what was to follow, for Jesus would use this power to heal as proof of His overall authority.

5.18-19 'And behold, men bring on a bed a man who was paralysed, and they sought to bring him in, and to lay him before him, and not finding by what way they might bring him in because of the crowd, they went up to the housetop, and let him down through the tiles, with his couch, into the midst before Jesus.'

While Jesus was speaking some men arrived (Mark tells us that there were four) carrying a litter in which was a paralysed man. But there was no way through the crowd. So the four men, confident that Jesus could and would help them, went up the stone steps on the outside of the house which led up to the roof, taking the man with them. (We have here the reminiscence of an eyewitness). It probably took some manoeuvring for they would not want to spill the man out of the litter, but at last they achieved it. Then they broke open the roof of the house by removing some clay objects (keramos - tiles?) and lowered the man down.

It would be a typical small town house. It would probably be a one storey house and would have stone steps round the back which led on to the roof for access to the roof, which would be flat, but with a balustrade as required by the Law (Deuteronomy 22.8). This was a place where those who lived in the house could go for comparative quiet and privacy. Luke lets us know that the roof was at least partly clay covered (keramos). This may signify clay tiles. Mark does not tell us what the roof consisted of. It was not able to thwart the attempts of four determined men to dig through and break it open. And as long as the beams were not harmed it would be easy and cheap to repair again by replacing the tiles. There were by this time tiled roofs in Galilee.

5.20 'And seeing their faith, he said, "Man, your sins are forgiven you." '

Jesus was clearly moved by the faith and persistence of these five men (including the paralytic). He 'saw their faith'. But then He did the unexpected. Turning to the man He said to him, 'Your sins are forgiven.' This was in the perfect passive indicative and could therefore mean 'have been and therefore are forgiven'. But some see it as an aoristic perfect and as thus meaning 'are this moment forgiven'. Both interpretations are possible. Either way forgiveness was declared, and when Jesus used the passive in this way He was intending God to be seen as

the subject (compare Matthew 5.1-10).

But we may ask why did He speak like this when the man had come for healing? No Jew of that time would have asked such a question. They would have agreed that his condition must connect with some sin, either his or his parents (compare John 9.2), and that forgiveness of that sin could well relate to any attempt to heal. But Jesus did not think like that. Clearly as He looked at the man, with his eager gaze fixed on Him, possibly clouded by fear that he was not worthy, He knew something specific about this man which led Him to say it. And besides He wanted it made quite clear that He was not a doctor but a prophet. He was first of all concerned with men's inner souls. Once that was right healings could follow.

It is quite possible that the paralysis had actually resulted from some deep sin. Cases are known where people have become paralysed as a result of some traumatic event in their lives. That cannot be ruled out. But it is more likely that Jesus knew of his private struggle with sin and knew that he had prayed, 'God be merciful to me a sinner', and yet was still in doubt. Whatever the situation Jesus knew that the greatest need of this man was an assurance of forgiveness. His healing was secondary. And His very words seem to suggest that He knew that this man had repented and that God had forgiven him. So He gives that assurance.

5.21 'And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, "Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?"'

The Scribes would probably be mainly the local Scribes, doctors and teachers of the Law (depending on verse 17), supported perhaps by one or two from Judaea and Jerusalem. The larger party from Jerusalem would come later. Being mainly local they were almost certainly Pharisees, with any other having been brought in by the locals. (Some Scribes were Sadducees). They were looked to by the people to interpret the Law and did so on the basis of oral tradition passed down among them, much of which was the result of scribal decisions in the past. There would appear to have been three types of such oral tradition: (a) some oral laws which were claimed as having come from Moses as having been given by the great lawgiver in addition to the written laws; (b) decisions made by various judges which had become precedents in judicial matters; and (c) interpretations of great teachers (Rabbis) which came to be prized with the same reverence as were the Old Testament Scriptures. In order to become Scribes they had to become learned in these oral traditions, which were called 'the tradition of the Elders'. They looked on themselves, and were generally looked on by the people, as the guardians of the Law. They had almost certainly come to sound out this new teacher so as to make a judgment on Him.

'Began to reason.' They were weighing up His words and coming to their 'considered' judgment on them. They had not come to learn but to act as critics. Thus when they heard His words to the paralysed man their ears pricked up, and they probably whispered quietly among themselves. 'How dare He speak like this? It is pure blasphemy. For surely only God can forgive sins.' Had they listened more reasonably they might have recognised that He had not quite said what they thought. Like Nathan of old He had only assured the man of God's forgiveness (2 Samuel 12.13). But they were not thinking sympathetically.

'He speaks blasphemies.' That is, He is taking over God's prerogative and therefore acting against God. Indeed almost making Himself out to be the equal of God. Their words remind us how easy it is to be so set in our thoughts that we can only think in one way. They had not come to think fairly about what Jesus was saying, or what He was doing. They had come to measure it by their yardstick. And in that light there could be only one conclusion. And in fact by that yardstick even a Messiah coming in terms of their own expectations would have been a blasphemer. The theory of a Messiah was fine, but the actuality was not, and never would be, acceptable to them unless He handed over all religious aspects to them. A free thinking Messiah would not be allowable.

‘Who can forgive sins but God alone?’ They were, of course, correct. From the point of view of being forgiven in the sight of God (which was what Jesus had meant) it was only God Who could do it. But Jesus had actually spoken ambiguously. They could have seen it as meaning simply, ‘God has forgiven you’ as a word of comfort and assurance, but they saw it as meaning ‘I have bestowed on you God’s forgiveness’. In their view that went along with His outrageous religious attitude. But it was open to men either to see Him as a declarer of forgiveness (as with Nathan in 2 Samuel 12.13) or as One Who shared the prerogative of God. The Scribes, in fact, actually came to the right conclusion, that He could forgive sins, but made the wrong response. Because of their prejudice they were not willing to yield to the truth.

5.22-23 ‘But Jesus perceiving their reasonings, answered and said to them, “Why do you reason in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you’, or to say, ‘Arise and walk?’”

Jesus gathered what they were thinking and whispering among themselves (for Jesus’ ability to discern thoughts compare 12.15; John 2.24). What a contrast between what He knew about the paralytic and what He knew about them. He knew what the paralysed man had been thinking, about his faith, and about his uncertainty in respect of his worthiness. Now He knew what these men were thinking, about their lack of faith, and about their confidence in their own worthiness. And so He challenged them. They had been following Him around, they had seen some of His miracles. Well, let them now decide. Which was easiest, to declare a man’s sins forgiven or to heal him and make him walk? Let them think about that.

If they did so in the light of their own teaching their reply would have been, ‘Neither, for the one cannot happen without the other.’

So His reply was astute. He would agree that only God could forgive sins, but who could heal people? The answer was again, only God. In that case surely the One who could heal was proving that He was of God and could therefore also declare God’s forgiveness.

They were caught in the net of their own teaching. They believed that illness and disease was the consequence of sin. Thus for someone to be healed by God meant that their sin had been dealt with. The healing demonstrated forgiveness. A later Rabbi would say, ‘a sick man does not recover from his sickness until all his sins are forgiven him’. So the fact that Jesus healed men and women should have suggested to them that He had the power to determine whether God had forgiven a man.

Indeed they should have recognised that this was to be the proof positive that the Kingship of God had come. Isaiah 53.5-6 made quite clear that One was coming on Whom all their iniquities would be laid, because He bore them on their behalf. Did that not mean that He would bring forgiveness? But He would also carry their diseases. Jeremiah 31.34 made clear that when the Kingship of God came men’s sins would be freely forgiven. And Micah declared that in those days God would turn and have compassion on them, pardoning sin and passing by transgression, delighting in mercy (7.18-19). For then would be opened to the house of David a fountain for sin and uncleanness (Zechariah 13.1).

So if the Kingly Rule of God was drawing near they should recognise from the Scriptures that the One Who brought it would also bring forgiveness. And as well as forgiveness He would bring healing. The eyes of the blind would be opened, the ears of the deaf unstopped and the lame would leap like a hart (Isaiah 29.18; 35.4-6; 61.1-2). Thus forgiveness and healing would go together. They had seen the latter constantly in His ministry. Did they not see then that that meant that the Kingly Rule of God with its consequences of forgiveness had come? That the acceptable year of the Lord was now here. Yet still they would not concede the point for they were not willing to face the consequences. They did not want the hearers in the crowd to think that it meant that this man Jesus had been justified in declaring the man’s sins forgiven. So

they did not reply. They sat there silent, but unforgiving, and for that reason quietly ignored. They have ceased for the present to be important. (Luke only mentions what is important to his theme).

5.24 'But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins', he said to him who was paralysed, "I say to you, Arise, and take up your couch, and go to your house." '

Here we have the positive message that this account is all about. The sudden switch in subject in the middle of the verse should be noted. It has caused some to see the original account as having been interfered with in one way or the other before Mark got hold of it. But it is difficult to see how Mark could have got over this point so personally and yet so succinctly without using this method. And the fact that scholarly Luke accepts it by citing him suggests that he saw nothing wrong with it. It is in fact dramatic. Jesus makes His solemn declaration to the Scribes and then instantly speaks to the man, all in one breath, closely connecting the two. The repetition of 'He said to him who was paralysed,' is not a simple repetition but a deliberate contrast with what He says in verse 20. The repetition draws attention to the contrast between that and here. The point is brought home. The purity of the Greek takes second place.

His new claim is startling. Now He has moved from ambiguity to clarity. 'So that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins.' He claims authority on earth to forgive sins! 'Forgive' is in the present infinitive, 'to go on forgiving sins' as a personal activity. And we notice that the words are spoken directly to the Rabbis. It is they whose thoughts He is challenging. He wants them to know that He can forgive sins in God's name, something which no other can do.

But we note first the title under which He claims the right to forgive sins. He does so as 'the Son of Man'. Some have tried to make this mean simply 'man' on the basis of the Aramaic, but Mark was an Aramaic speaker and yet he translated it as 'the Son of Man', with Luke following suit, treating it as a title and making an unambiguous connection with the ideas that lie behind that term. It is significant that in the Gospels the term is only ever used on the lips of Jesus (Mark 8.31; Luke 24.7; and John 12.34 are not really exceptions for they are referring to what Jesus actually said), and in the New Testament only ever referred to Jesus. Thus there are no good grounds for denying these words to Jesus.

He begins to develop the term from the moment of His baptism. His first use of it is to Nathaniel at his call following Jesus' baptism, where He speaks of angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man (John 1.51). He then uses it to Nicodemus with clear heavenly connections. 'No man has ascended into Heaven but He Who descended out of Heaven, even the Son of Man' (John 3.13). Thus according to John the Son of Man is closely connected with Heaven and has His source in Heaven right from the beginning. And as we have seen above He continues using it to depict His own authority, to depict His manhood, to depict His coming sufferings and to depict His coming in glory, all of which He partakes in as God's chosen One.

The connection with the coming in glory unquestionably connects the title with Daniel 7.13-14. There 'a son of man' comes on the clouds of Heaven to receive dominion and power and glory, and from the remainder of the chapter it is clear that He is the representative of the saints of the Most High, that is the future promised King of Israel. And by His receiving the kingship He obtains the power to judge and to show mercy, to condemn or to forgive. Thus Jesus is revealing Himself as this figure and declaring that He therefore has the power to forgive sins on earth. He leaves all who hear to consider what the full consequences of such a statement are.

To the problem that Jesus had set these men they could give no answer. Had they said that it

was easier 'to make the man walk' they would have had to do it. And they knew that they could not. Only a man in direct touch with God could do that. But they would not admit that they were wrong either. So they sank into sullen silence

Then Jesus drove in the last nail. He said to the paralytic, "I say to you, Arise, and take up your litter, and go to your house."

5.25 'And immediately he rose up before them, and took up that on which he lay, and departed to his house, glorifying God.'

And he did just that. He rose, took up what he was lying on, and went home glorifying God. So having accomplished the harder, Jesus had the right to expect that they would agree about the easier, or at least think about it.

But it is one of the evidences of the hardness of men's hearts that once they have determined something, they regularly stick to it, however much they might be proved to be wrong. It is in the end the test of the open or closed mind. And the minds of these men were firmly closed. There was no excuse for them. They had asked for proof and they had received it. But it was not really proof that they wanted, but submission to their ideas. Here was one who had made the paralytic walk when they could not. What did it tell the world? It told it that He was from God. But that they could not stomach. Let us not think of these men as sincerely wrong. They had proved themselves totally insincere. They did not want the truth. They only wanted to be acknowledged as right.

5.26 'And amazement took hold on all, and they glorified God, and they were filled with awe, saying, "We have seen strange things today." '

But all the people who saw what had happened were amazed, and they glorified God and were filled with awe. They had no theological problem with it. They declared rightly, that "We have seen strange things today", that is things far beyond their expectations.

So by His actions Jesus has now established that He is the Son of man Who has the power on earth to forgive sins. Men did not have to wait until the Hereafter. They could know now that they were forgiven on the authority of Jesus, so close was His relationship with His Father. But the fact that He was so demonstrated that He was the One Who had come to the Father and received Kingly Rule and dominion. It demonstrated that He was the heavenly Messiah.

The Call of Levi. Jesus Is The Great Physician Who Can Heal The Outcast (5.27-32).

A narrative revealing that He had come to forgive sins is now followed by a passage revealing that he has come to call sinners to that forgiveness. Indeed He was going to shock the Pharisees and scribes even more by calling a hated outcast to follow Him. This man was a tax collector, a customs officer, and every eyebrow in Galilee would be raised when he was called. They did not know that he would go on to write a Gospel.

Levi was a man who served the hated ruler Herod Antipas as a local official collecting tolls on his behalf from those who passed along that route, probably the trade route from Damascus. For Capernaum was basically a frontier town between the territory of Herod and that of Philip. Such people were despised. They were considered to be betrayers of the people, for they were dishonest and lined their pockets by mean of extra 'taxes' at everyone's expense. And with their constant contact with Gentiles they were seen as continually ritually unclean. They were seen on the whole as very unpleasant and irreligious people who were seen as traitors by all decent people.

The resulting criticism would then lead on to Jesus revealing that He was come as the Great Physician, the One sent by God to heal the wounds of His people, and to aid specially the hurt of soul. He was answering the call of God, 'is there no physician there?' (Jeremiah 8.22). There the heart of God is revealed as breaking because of the sickness of His people, because the Lord was not in Zion, because her King was not in her (Jeremiah 8.19), and His people

had missed their opportunity. Elsewhere in the Old Testament God is revealed as the Great Physician, for it was to Him that the Psalmist said, "I said, Oh Lord, have mercy on me, heal my soul for I have sinned against you" (Psalm 41.4). While Isaiah tells us that He is the God Who is the healer of those with a humble and contrite spirit (Isaiah 57.15-19). And that is precisely what Jesus was intending to do here, to heal the souls of those who were repentant and who sought God. He was here on earth doing God's healing work for sinners. He was here to set God's king in Zion (compare Psalm 2.6-8). Thus once again He reveals Himself as acting in God's name, on God's behalf, doing God's work, in a way that was connected with His Sonship.

He could thus say, "I have come (as a doctor) not to call the righteous, but sinners" and thus align Himself with God as the Great Physician. He saw in these people those who said, "Come and let us return to the Lord. For He has torn us and He will heal us. He has smitten and He will bind us up" (Hosea 6.1). (Notice that Hosea 6.2 may well be behind His claim that He would be raised on the third day and 6.6 is quoted by Him against the Pharisees in Matthew 9.13. This was clearly a passage He knew well and applied to His ministry, which may suggest He had it in mind here).

We may analyse this passage as follows:

- a And after these things he went forth, and beheld a public servant, named Levi, sitting at the tollbooth, and said to him, "Follow me" (27).
- b And he forsook all, and rose up and followed him (28).
- c And Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a great crowd of public servants and of others who were sitting at meat with them (29).
- d And the Pharisees and their scribes murmured against his disciples (30a).
- c Saying, "Why do you eat and drink with the public servants and sinners?" (30b).
- b And Jesus answering said to them, "Those who are in health have no need of a physician, but those who are sick" (31).
- a "I am not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance" (32)

Note that in 'a' Levi, the outcast, is called to follow Jesus and in the parallel Jesus has come to call sinners to repentance. In 'b' Levi leaves all and follows Him, and in the parallel Jesus is the physician for the ailing. In 'c' public servants and 'others' gather for a meal and in the parallel the questions is why the disciples eat with public servants and sinners. Central in 'd' is the antagonism of the Pharisees and scribes.

5.27 'And after these things he went forth, and beheld a public servant, named Levi, sitting at the tollbooth, and said to him, "Follow me."'

The Pharisees and scribes now being against Him Jesus adds to their cause for distress, for He walks past a customs post and tollbooth and calls a public servant serving there to follow Him. Levi (Matthew is his other name) need not necessarily have been on his own. There would be two or three manning the booth, supported by soldiers. But Jesus could hardly doubt that His action would provoke anger. He had no doubt had conversations with Levi before this when Levi had come to hear Him speak, and had recognised his genuine repentance and a heart that sincerely sought after God. Indeed the call may not have come as a surprise to Levi, only the timing of it. But Jesus clearly intended it to be public. It could hardly fail to cause a stir. Neither the Pharisees nor the Herodians (whom Levi served) would be pleased, and even the general public would look askance. It was a brave, even a daring, thing to do.

It is thus clear that Jesus wanted to make public the fact that repentance and forgiveness was open to even the lowest level of society, and that He did not mind what a person had been as long as they genuinely turned to God from the heart, even though it offended the very religious.

This would also be noted by Luke's Gentile readers. They too were to recognise that the way

was open for them also.

It should be noted that the Pharisees would not necessarily have turned away a public servant who wanted to change his ways, any more than they would Gentiles. But they would have demanded deep humility, a period of penance, and his recognition that he began at a subservient level. The convert would have had to walk a hard and difficult path towards restoration. It would be many years before he could 'redeem' himself. But with Jesus it was different. Levi was not only to be accepted, but he was accepted immediately and was given the privilege of being a called disciple, sharing equally with the other disciples.

'He beheld.' Not a chance sighting, but a deliberate act of seeing. He had come there to find him.

5.28 'And he forsook all, and rose up and followed him.'

And in response to Jesus' call Levi forsook all, rose up and followed Him. He was leaving behind a secure government post and the possibility of great wealth, but it counted as nothing to him compared with the privilege that was now his. It was evidence of his genuine turning to God. 'Follow Me' always indicates lifetime commitment (compare John 1.43; Mark 1.17) as the future makes clear.

5.29 'And Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a great crowd of public servants and of others who were sitting at meat with them.'

Levi did not turn his back on his fellow public servants and his friends. He threw a last final great feast and invited them along to it to meet the new prophet. And because he was well known many came. It would include many who paid little heed to the niceties of the Pharisees, although we should note that Jesus almost certainly observed them, for He was not subjected to personal criticism by the Pharisees. They were no doubt watching Him closely for any looseness in His behaviour. It was the motive behind the feast that made it right. It was not a lingering look to his past life, but an attempt to reach out to his friends and fellow-workers with the Gospel.

They would not, however, have been pleased with Jesus being there, any more than they were with His disciples. Even mixing with such people risked ritual uncleanness.

5.30 'And the Pharisees and their scribes murmured against his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with the public servants and sinners?"'

The Pharisees and scribes were wary of approaching Jesus. He had bested them once and they did not want to be bested again. Or it may be that they did not want to come in too close a contact with those enjoying the feast, for to them they were ritually 'unclean'. So they rather approached His disciples. And they asked why they were eating and drinking like this with public servants and sinners. Did they not realise that they were degrading themselves and themselves risking ritual uncleanness? By sinners they meant people who did not observe the niceties of the Pharisees, not necessarily bad living people.

We do not actually know whether this took place while the feast was going on, or afterwards, but it makes no difference to the points at issue. However, the news that Jesus had called a tax-collector to be His disciple would surely have brought them hurrying to the spot. Surely they had got Him now?

5.31-32 'And Jesus answering said to them, "Those who are in health have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I am not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

Jesus took over the question and gave them His reply. He wanted them and the world to know that He had not come simply to mingle with 'the righteous', that is those who strove to keep the Law and thought that they did so (who would not be many in number). He had come to

those who were sick of soul and in need. He had come to save and restore. Those who were in health did not need a doctor, only those who were sick. Thus He was here to be a spiritual doctor to sinners and all in need. He was here to call them to turn to God in repentance.

It is probable that He had mind the words in Jeremiah 8.22, 'Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?' He had come for the purpose of meeting that lack, to provide a balm in Gilead, and to be that physician. But He was not really suggesting that the Pharisees did not need a physician. They in fact desperately needed one. He was pointing out that the recovery of God's people in these last days required a physician like Himself, and that He had come for all who recognised their need and admitted their spiritual ill-health. Those who thought themselves already righteous would not come to Him. Thus He could not help them. But for all who recognised their need, whoever they were, He was available.

His claim to be God's physician must be seen for what it is. He is setting Himself up as having a certain level of uniqueness. He is able to restore sinners because he is not a sinner. The ailing and sick doctor is little use to his patients. And He is calling them to repentance, to turn to God with all their hearts. He can do this because He need no repentance. Here is the only Son acting on behalf of His Father. We may compare Jesus' willingness to be a healer here with the man in Isaiah 3.7, who was not prepared to be a healer because it would be too costly and demanding. Jesus minded neither the cost nor the demand. The Father had sought a physician and He was here.

A Question About Fasting. Jesus Has Come As The Promised Bridegroom (5.33-35).

The revelation of the glory of Jesus continues. Not only is He the Son of Man Who can forgive sins, and God's Physician Who can restore the outcast, but he is the Promised Bridegroom Who brings rejoicing and a new beginning for His people.

The revelation results from a mundane question about fasting. We can analyse this chapter as follows:

- a They said to him, "The disciples of John fast often, and make supplications, likewise also the disciples of the Pharisees, But yours eat and drink" (33).
- b Jesus said to them, "Can you make the sons of the bride-chamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them?"
- c But the days will come, and when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, then will they fast in those days" (34-35)
- d He spoke also a parable to them, "No man tears a piece from a new garment and puts it on an old garment, or else he will tear the new, and also the piece from the new will not agree with the old" (36).
- c And no man puts new wine into old wineskins, or else the new wine will burst the skins, and itself will be spilled, and the skins will perish" (37).
- b "But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins" (38).
- a And no man having drunk old wine desires new, for he says, "The old is good" (39).

Note that in 'a' the disciples of John and the Pharisees prefer the old ways, and in the parallel those who drink old wine prefer it to the new. In 'b' the sons of the bride-chamber opt for the new ways, and in the parallel new wine must be put into fresh wineskins. In 'c' there is to be mourning because the Bridegroom will be taken away, and in the parallel the use of old wineskins with new wine result in a perishing. In 'd' the central thought is that the old garment must not be patched with the new.

5.33 'And they said to him, "The disciples of John fast often, and make supplications, likewise also the disciples of the Pharisees, But yours eat and drink." '

The complaint is brought by 'they' who are unidentified. They may be puzzled onlookers or critical opponents. Their problem is that while both the disciples of John and of the Pharisees regularly fast, and make supplications, this is not true of His own disciples. They rather eat and drink. This last links with the feasting in the previous passage. But the question is concerned with whether His disciples have the right attitude to spiritual things. Is it not right to fast?

We know that the Pharisees encouraged twice a week fasting (18.12) on Mondays and Thursdays, and may presume that John's disciples did similarly, although not necessarily on the same days. The purpose of such fasting was linked with mourning because the Kingly Rule of God had not yet come, and probably in the case of John's disciples because he was in prison. The 'supplications' would be in order to put right what was wrong, and now that Jesus was here would be no longer necessary. They would be replaced by new supplications as given in the Lord's prayer.

'The disciples of the Pharisees.' This is shorthand for the disciples of the Pharisaic Rabbis/Scribes (there were also Sadducean Scribes) who were the Pharisaic equivalent of John.

5.34 'And Jesus said to them, "Can you make the sons of the bride-chamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them?"

Jesus therefore points out that such fasting would be inappropriate. The Bridegroom has come. The Kingly Rule of God is at hand. Those therefore who are benefiting from it should not be fasting but rejoicing.

His first point is that fasting is reserved for times of mourning and unhappiness, mourning over failure and unhappiness about sin, and especially mourning because God has not yet acted in history and the Messiah and the Holy Spirit's outpouring have not come. But those who are appointed at a wedding to be with the bridegroom to sustain him cannot fast, for they would then mar the celebrations. Rather must they eat and drink and be joyful. A Jewish wedding lasted for seven days, and they were days of feasting and merriment during which the bridegroom would be celebrating. And he would have with him his closest friends to share his joy with him. To seek to fast under such circumstances would be an insult. (The Rabbis indeed excluded people at a wedding feast from the need to fast). Thus a unique occasion, and only a unique occasion exempted men from fasting.

This in itself was a remarkable claim, that because He had come men need not fast. It was to claim divine prerogative. Moses could not have said it. Elijah could not have said it. John the Baptist could not have said it. It required a greater than they.

But unquestionably Jesus was conveying a deeper message even than this, as the next verse brings out. He was pointing out that the Messiah had come. He was pointing to Himself as the great Bridegroom whose presence meant that men need not fast, the great Bridegroom promised in the Scriptures. In Isaiah 62.5, the prophet had said "As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so will your God rejoice over you". The picture there is emphasised and poignant. Isaiah points out that they have been called Forsaken, and their land Desolate, but they will be renamed because God delights in them and their land will be married. They will become God's bride. He will be their Bridegroom. So there God is the Bridegroom, and His restored people are the Bride, and it is clearly pointing to the time of restoration. Thus Jesus, by describing Himself as the Bridegroom of God's restored people, shows that He is uniquely standing in the place of God and introducing the time of restoration.

A similar vivid picture is also brought out in Jeremiah 2.2 where the Lord says of His people, "I remember concerning you the kindness of your youth, the love of your espousals, how you went after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown." Here we have the Lord as the Bridegroom in waiting (compare Jeremiah 2.32. Compare also Ezekiel 16.8-14). It is thus very

doubtful whether a discerning listener would fail to catch at least something of this implication.

Furthermore that Jesus emphatically saw Himself as the Bridegroom comes out elsewhere in the Gospels. Consider the marriage feast for the son (Matthew 22.2-14) and the Bridegroom at the wedding where the foolish virgins were excluded (Matthew 25.1-13), both clear pictures of Jesus. So His being the Bridegroom was a theme of His. And John the Baptist described Him in the same way (John 3.29). Thus Jesus was by this declaring in another way that the ‘the Kingly Rule of God has drawn near’, and that He was a unique figure come from God, the heavenly Bridegroom, God’s Messiah.

But if God has come on earth as the Bridegroom, how can there be fasting by those who have recognised Him and welcomed Him? It would not be seemly. The others only fast because the truth has not come home to them.

5.35 “But the days will come, and when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, then will they fast in those days.”

But then Jesus comes in with an ominous warning. The words He has spoken confirm that we are to see in the picture of the Bridegroom something significant concerning Jesus. And this is clear in that the Bridegroom, Who was now here, will one day be ‘taken away’ forcibly and then they will have good cause to fast. Jesus knew already from the voice at His baptism that He was called on to fulfil the ministry of the suffering Servant, and this had been confirmed by John’s words, “Behold the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1.29). Thus we have here the first indication of His awareness of the brutal end that awaited Him. He knew that He must face suffering on behalf of His people. And then indeed His disciples would fast.

Interestingly the words do not encourage regular fasting. The disciples would indeed sorrow but their sorrow would be turned into joy (John 16.20). Thus the need for fasting would quickly pass and would be no more. There is no real encouragement to fasting here. It is not, however forbidden. The point is that it is not required. Those who serve the King are not bound by petty regulations but are concerned with how they can please Him. If they fast it is in order to better serve Him, not because it is necessary for their own spiritual lives, for as regards this He is more than sufficient.

So we have here both Jesus’ testimony to the fact that He is God’s Sent One, over Whom men should rejoice, and with it an indication that He is aware of the future that awaits Him. The cross would not catch Him by surprise (compare 2.35).

This declaration that Jesus has come as the heavenly Bridgroom and is inaugurating a new world is then brought out by two illustrations.

It Is The Time of New Clothing and New Wine (5.36-39).

By His parable here Jesus is declaring that it is a time of new clothing and new wine. The old must not be supplemented by the new, but the new must replace the old. We are reminded by this of God’s promises to reclothe His people (Zechariah 3.4-5 compare Matthew 22.11-12; and the idea in Ezekiel 16.10-14 with 59-63), and to give them new wine to drink (Isaiah 25.6 compare John 2.1-11).

5.36 ‘And he spoke also a parable to them, “No man tears a piece from a new garment and puts it on an old garment, or else he will tear the new, and also the piece from the new will not agree with the old.”

Jesus is here declaring that He has brought something new which must not be spoiled by mingling it with the old. He is bringing the new clothing of the Kingly Rule of God.

In context the application of it is against fasting. It is saying that we should not take old ideas,

(in context the ideas about fasting), and apply them to a new situation, or try to fit the new into the old. That would be like cutting a piece from a new garment so as to mend the old. That would be ridiculous. Both garments would be spoiled. To put together the ideas of the old ways and the new would be incompatible. They do not match. With Jesus everything has begun anew.

This suggests that He saw fasting as being mainly for the old dispensation, but not for the new. The old world fasted because they waited in penitence for God to act. But now God was acting and fasting was a thing of the past. Now was the time for rejoicing.

However, the words also contain within them the general idea that what Jesus Himself has come to bring is new. 'The Kingly Rule of God has drawn near'. So now is to be a time of rejoicing and everything must be looked at in its light. The old had past, and the new has come (compare 2 Corinthians 5.17). Two examples of this appear in the Old Testament. The first is in Ezekiel 16 where Israel, having been splendidly clothed by God is defiled because of her idolatrous practises. But God promises that in the end He will put all right. The second is in Zechariah 4.3-5 where Joshua the High Priest, the representative of Israel, is clothed in new clothing as an illustration of acceptance by God. From these we may gather that Jesus has come to reclothe His people with pure clothing (compare Matthew 22.11-12; Revelation 19.8).

The extraordinary significance of this statement must not be overlooked. Jesus had clearly declared that in His coming as the Bridegroom a whole new way of thinking and living had been introduced. He was the introducer of a new age. It was the acceptable year of the Lord. Repentance and forgiveness in the new age into which they were now entering would lead to lives of joy with first the earthly and then the heavenly (risen) Bridegroom. Thus fasting will be unnecessary except in exceptional circumstances, in the brief period before final victory. Everything is different and old ways must be forgotten.

And this is because Jesus is introducing new clothing. This gains new meaning in the light of Jesus' idea elsewhere, which He Himself may have had in mind, for the man who seeks to enter the heavenly wedding without having a proper wedding garment on will be cast out (Matthew 22.11-12 compare Revelation 19.8; 3.5, 18). Those who would enter His presence must be clothed in His righteousness alone. There must be no partially patched up dress for them.

It will be noted that the illustration here is different from that in Mark. Jesus probably used the same illustration a number of times, varying it slightly when He wanted to make a different point. Mark has clearly used one example, and Luke another. The one Luke has chosen has the advantage to him that, secondarily to its main meaning, it brings out that there is no point in trying to turn Gentiles into Jews.

5.37 "And no man puts new wine into old wineskins, or else the new wine will burst the skins, and itself will be spilled, and the skins will perish."

The point is emphasised again using the idea of putting new wine into old wineskins. To do so would be to cause the dried out old skins to burst. They are no longer elastic enough to cope with the fermentation of new wine. Then all would be lost, the new wine and the wineskins, for the skins would perish.

As the parallel above reveals this includes the idea that in order for the new to prosper there must be His death. Because Jesus has come to a place which is like dried out, old wineskins, His having come can only result in His death (the new wine will be lost) and the destruction of the place to which He has come (the old wineskins, Jerusalem, will perish).

5.38 "But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins."

Here is the solution, to keep the new wine to new wineskins, and not try to mix it with the old. Everything must be seen anew. Thus must they rejoice in the bridegroom, and not fast over

Him, and they must receive His new message (which will be declared shortly), putting the old (Judaism) aside.

The idea is carried further in John 2.1-11 where the new wine symbolises the glories of the Messianic age. The time has come for the fulfilment of Isaiah 25.6.

5.39 “And no man having drunk old wine desires new, for he says, “The old is good.”

But there will always be those who cling to the old wine and prefer it to the new, saying the old is better. That is what both the disciples of John and the disciples of the Pharisees are doing. Let all therefore be warned. There is no longer any place for the old.

These illustrations reach far beyond just the question of fasting. They emphasise that there is a real sense in which Christianity is new. Through His death Jesus has fulfilled the old, and now we can look from it to the new way of living taught by Him. This claim to total newness is another example of the uniqueness of Jesus.

Chapter 6 Further Incidents and Teaching.

In this sixth chapter we have the incident of the grainfields where Jesus again describes Himself as the Son of Man, and as Lord of the Sabbath; the healing of the man with the withered hand, which again reveals Him as the Great Restorer and Lord of the Sabbath; the appointment of the twelve Apostles; and the first extended example of His teaching.

Jesus is the Son of Man and the Lord of the Sabbath (6.1-5).

In this incident Jesus as the Son of Man puts Himself on at least the same level as David, and as such calls Himself ‘the Son of Man’. We are reminded again of Daniel 7.13-14 where the Son of Man, as the representative leader of Israel, claims His dominion and power. Jesus is claiming that He is this representative leader. He is the Greater David (compare the ‘Anointed One’ (Messiah) in Daniel 9.26). As such He then claims to be Lord of the Sabbath, that is, able to make binding decisions concerning the Sabbath.

This incident also represents a hardening of the position of the Pharisees with regard to Him. They give to Jesus and His disciples an official warning (‘it is not lawful’). So to authorities are seen to be in conflict, on the one hand the heaven appointed Son of Man and on the other the earthly authority of the Pharisees. To disobey the latter was to run the risk of being beaten at the command of the synagogue elders.

It is difficult to overemphasise the importance of the Sabbath to religious Jews. It was to them the sign that they were God’s holy nation, God’s own people. But it had become overlaid with the traditions of the Elders who were so eager to prevent it being dishonoured that they had made strict rules about it, which had gone beyond what was reasonable, while at the same time allowing a certain amount of sophistry with regard to it. Thus there was a limit as to how far you could walk on the Sabbath (a Sabbath day’s journey), but this was then allowed to be doubled by leaving food a Sabbath days journey from home, and treating that as ‘home’ for the day. Then you could walk to it and after that go a Sabbath days journey beyond it. It might have been humerous if it had not been treated so seriously. They could do it without even the trace of a smile, and see no incongruity in it.

We should note that Jesus’ claim to be Lord of the Sabbath was not a claim to be able to use it as He wished, but to be able to determine what the requirements of the Sabbath really were. Thus here He will counteract a pedantic interpretation of it, and in the next incident an uncompassionate one.

The passage can be analysed as follows:

- a On a sabbath He was going through the grainfields, and his disciples plucked the ears, and ate, rubbing them in their hands (1).
- b Certain of the Pharisees said, “Why do you do what is not lawful to do on the

- sabbath day?” (2).
- c Jesus replied “Have you not read even this, what David did, when he was hungry, he, and those who were with him?” (3).
- b “How he entered into the house of God, and took and ate the showbread, and gave also to those who were with him, that which it is not lawful to eat save for the priests alone?” (4).
- a And he said to them, “The Son of man is lord of the sabbath” (5).

Note that in ‘a’ we have the behaviour of the Jesus (the Son of Man) and His disciples in the grainfield, and in the parallel that as Son of man He has the right to determine whether it is right or not. In ‘b’ we have the Pharisees declaring what is not lawful, and in the parallel we have Jesus’ declaration of what was also not lawful, but which history demonstrates that the Pharisees do not criticise. Central to the incident is that what David does is considered to be right, and the same courtesy must therefore be extended to the Greater David.

6.1 ‘Now it came about on a sabbath, that he was going through the grainfields, and his disciples plucked the ears, and ate, rubbing them in their hands.’

On this particular Sabbath Jesus was walking through a grainfield with His disciples. The Law of Moses allowed anyone walking through a grainfield to partake of the grain for his own needs, but not to put in a sickle (Deuteronomy 23.25). This was to be of especial benefit to the poor. Thus the disciples were within their rights in what they were doing. They were plucking the grain, rubbing it between their hands in order to rid it of the husk, and then eating it. But as they were not used to being too strict about Sabbath Day observance they had failed to recognise that this might cause offence.

For the ‘Elders’ had laid down the principle that reaping and threshing were not allowed on the Sabbath for they were to be seen as work. Jesus would not have disagreed with that. Where the controversy came in was in interpreting what the disciples had been doing as ‘reaping and threshing’. He would have been able to point out that reaping and threshing someone else’s field would have been frowned on as breaking the Law (they must not put in the sickle), so that as the Law allowed what His disciples were doing it was not seen as reaping and threshing. But the Pharisees saw it otherwise, and the synagogue elders would probably have backed them.)Under later interpretation they would have been able to do what they did to amounts less than the size of a dried fig, so pedantic had things become). So Jesus will advance another argument which will also emphasise His own authority.

6.2 ‘But certain of the Pharisees said, “Why do you do what is not lawful to do on the sabbath day?”

Some of the Pharisees became aware of what His disciples were doing. It may be that they had been walking with the disciples, professing interest in Jesus’ message, while carefully watching for any failures in the behaviour of Jesus and His disciples, or it may be that it had simply been reported to them by people who saw it, bringing them hurriedly to the scene. Either way they pointed out that He and His disciples (as their Master He was responsible) were doing what was not lawful on the Sabbath Day.

‘What is not lawful to do.’ We should note that this is probably not just a comment. It is an official warning. Proceedings could not be taken under the Law at the first offence. The culprits had first to be warned so as to ensure that they did know what the Law was. If the warning was then ignored, proceedings could be taken. (compare Acts 4.18 with 5.17). Thus Jesus and His disciples were being warned that if it happened again proceedings would be taken. The opposition was hardening.

6.3-4 ‘And Jesus answering them said, “Have you not read even this, what David did, when he was hungry, he, and those who were with him? How he entered into the house of God, and took and ate the showbread, and gave also to those who were with him, that which it is not

lawful to eat save for the priests alone?” ’

Jesus replied from a well known passage concerning David. There David and his companions had persuaded the High Priest of the day to let him and his men have the old showbread which had been taken from the Table of Showbread in the Tabernacle when, as was the custom, it was replaced. This was holy and could only be eaten by the priests. But David had pleaded special circumstances and that his men were in a state of consecration, and it had been allowed. No one now criticised David for this because he was seen as having been God’s anointed. Jesus’ point was that as the Greater than David as ‘the Son of Man’, He had the same right. What David could lawfully do for himself and his men, He could lawfully do for Himself and His men. He could interpret the Law in their favour.

6.5 ‘And he said to them, “The Son of man is lord of the sabbath.” ’

And this was because as the Son of Man He was Lord of the Sabbath, that is, He was the overall authority who could make declarations of what was lawful to be done on the Sabbath Day. It was basically a claim to be the heaven appointed and heaven enthroned Messiah, thus setting Him up before God as having a higher authority than the Scribes, the Jewish teachers and arbiters of the Law.

The Man With The Withered Hand (6.6-11).

This final incident in this cycle of stories contrasts the rigidity of the Pharisees with the compassion of Jesus. The one were concerned with the minutiae of the Law, the Other with the heart of God. In it He again reveals that He is Lord of the Sabbath.

But it also reveals a deeper message, and that is that He has come to restore what is withered. The word used for ‘withered’ (Greek ‘xeros’ - Hebrew equivalent ‘yabash’) is the same as that used in LXX of the ‘dry’ bones in Ezekiel 37.2, 4. There the Spirit of the Lord would blow on them to give them life. God’s question was, will these dry bones live, and the answer was that they would in response to the proclamation of the word (‘prophesy’) when the Spirit came upon them. The same word is also used of the eunuch who says, ‘I am a dry tree’ (Isaiah 56.3), and in Ezekiel 17.24 God says, ‘I the Lord make the dry tree to flourish’. It is regularly used in the Old Testament of ‘dry trees’ (compare also Luke 23.31).

Thus in view of the context of the previous incidents which have all contained Old Testament motifs we are justified in seeing this man’s withered hand which will be made whole as a picture of the dry (withered) trees which will flourish and become fruitful (compare 3.8; 6.43-44; 13.6-9) and the dry (withered) bones of Israel which will be given life through the Spirit by the word of the prophet. As Jesus says here, ‘Is it lawful on the Sabbath day to do good (be like a fruitful tree which is no longer withered but produces fruit) or to do harm (be as a withered tree which produces no fruit), to save life (to make a restored bone that is no longer withered) or to kill (to make like a dry bone that is withered). It thus finalises this section with a picture of Jesus as at work in the restoration of what is dried out and withered (He prophesies to the dried arm and it lives), and leads on into the picture of the establishing of the new Israel. In contrast are the Pharisees who prove indeed to be dry trees.

Also in this narrative the Pharisees are seen as out to trap Jesus. Their opposition to Him has been growing and it has now reached a climax. There is a man there with a withered hand and they are deliberately watching to see what Jesus will do on the Sabbath day. By this they are laid bare. Here is a man in real need, and they know what Jesus will do. He will have compassion on the man and will heal him. Their very watching Him is a testimony to His goodness, and to the fact that they realise that He is good. And once He has revealed His goodness they will jump on Him and accuse Him of breaking God’s Law. And yet they claim to serve the One Who declared, ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself’. Consider what this tells us about them and their religion. But Jesus confuted them, not by diminishing the Sabbath, but by exalting it as of great benefit to mankind.

The incident may be analysed as follows:

- a On another sabbath, He entered into the synagogue and taught, and there was a man there, and his right hand was withered (6).
- b The scribes and the Pharisees watched him, whether he would heal on the sabbath, so that they might find how to accuse him (7).
- c He knew their thoughts, and he said to the man who had his hand withered, "Rise up, and stand forth among us." And he arose and stood forth (8).
- d Jesus said to them, "I ask you, Is it lawful on the sabbath to do good, or to do harm? To save a life, or to destroy it?" (9).
- c He looked round about on them all, and said to him, "Stretch forth your hand" (10a)
- b And he did so, and his hand was restored (10b).
- a They were filled with mad fury, and discussed together one with another what they might do to Jesus (11).

Note that in 'a' we see the man whose arm is withered, and in the parallel we see the men whose minds are withered. In 'b' Jesus is watched to see if He will heal on the Sabbath and in the parallel the healing takes place. In 'c' Jesus tells the man to stand forth, and in the parallel He tells him to put forth his hand. Central in 'd' comes the crunch question as to what is lawful to do when faced with a choice of doing good or harm, saving life or destroying it.

6.6-7 'And it came about on another sabbath, that he entered into the synagogue and taught, and there was a man there, and his right hand was withered. And the scribes and the Pharisees watched him, whether he would heal on the sabbath, so that they might find how to accuse him.'

Another Sabbath arrived and Jesus once more entered a synagogue in order to teach. His heart was set on communion and fellowship with His Father. And there in the synagogue He saw a man with a withered hand, probably suffering from some form of muscular atrophy. We are not told who brought the man there, or where he came from. He may well have been well known there, and regular in attendance. Nor do we know how his hand had withered. It was enough that it was so. And with his right hand withered, his strength was withered. It was a symbol of the state of the hearts and consciences of men (see above). They too are atrophied. But that he was seen by the Pharisees as a test case is apparent from the fact that they watched Jesus in order to see what He would do. The word means to watch with intent, often sinister. Their minds were not on communion and fellowship with God. Their thoughts were fixed on trying to trap this Man, Whom they hated, into performing a work of compassion which they could then condemn. And this on God's day in God's synagogue.

The Rabbis had strict rules about healing on the Sabbath. Where there was an emergency case and life was threatened the minimum healing activity necessary to preserve life was allowed, but where that was not the case, it could well await another day. Healing was not allowed. Thus a woman in childbirth could be helped on the Sabbath. She or the baby might die. An affection of the throat could be treated for that was seen as possibly life threatening. But a fracture or a sprain could not. A cut could be bandaged (it could lead to death if uncovered) but it must not have further treatment until after the Sabbath. These interpretations of the Rabbis were strictly enforced.

On this day any Rabbis and other Pharisees who were in the Synagogue would be sitting in the 'chief seats' (Matthew 23.6; James 2.2-3), which were those nearest to the reading desk where the scrolls of the Scriptures were placed to be read. There was also a special seat for the most distinguished present called 'Moses' Seat' (Matthew 23.2). They thus had a good view of what was happening. So as they sat there enjoying their status they awaited further events.

They were pretty confident in their man. We note here two things. Firstly that they were absolutely confident in the fact that Jesus would heal the man. That is quite remarkable. They

had a kind of perverted faith. They had seen what He could do and were not in doubt about it. And secondly that they knew that He was so compassionate that He would do it even with them there waiting to accuse Him of it. What better testimony could Jesus have, both of His ability to work miracles, and of His compassion, and of His courage? And yet they were trying to convince themselves, and others, that Jesus was working for the Devil. All this gains the greater force because it is not the purpose of the recording of the incident. But consider what it tells us about these men.

‘His *right* hand was withered.’ Neither of the other Gospels tell us that it was his right hand that was withered, but as a doctor this would have been a question he would ask. It is a sign that he not only had Mark’s record before him, but had also spoken to an eyewitness. He may even have asked Peter when he met him, ‘can you tell me which hand was withered?’

And his withered right hand was like the withered lives of people. They who should have been fruitful trees were withered trees. They who should have been full of life (living bones) were walking in death (dry bones). He who could heal this withered arm had also come to heal withered lives.

6.8 ‘But he knew their thoughts, and he said to the man who had his hand withered, “Rise up, and stand forth among us.” And he arose and stood forth.’

Jesus was fully aware of the situation. ‘He knew their thoughts.’ This fact is stressed regularly (compare 5.22). However, they were not hard to assess. We can imagine the long hall, and the Pharisees sitting there in the chief seats, and the pointed silence when Jesus came in, and the eyes turning to look at the paralysed man. Jesus was left in no doubt of what the situation was.

He could have avoided confrontation. He could have told the man to come and see Him after sunset, when the Sabbath was over, but that would have been to concede that the Rabbis were right. And He did not believe that they were. In His eyes they had gone too far in their desire to preserve the Sabbath. And He further knew that they were directly challenging His authority, and that the crowds were aware of it as well. So He called the man to come and stand where everyone could see.

‘Rise up and stand forth among us.’ This is literally, ‘Rise into the midst’.

6.9 ‘And Jesus said to them, “I ask you, Is it lawful on the sabbath to do good, or to do harm? To save a life, or to destroy it?” ’

Jesus could see the workings of their hearts. He knew exactly what they were thinking. And He knew that they had it in their minds to have Him killed. So while to the ordinary people His words were about the man and his condition, and He was asking whether he should heal (do good) or refrain from healing (do harm and fail to help the man in his distress), the Pharisees knew that He knew their hearts and was speaking of them. It was they who were there to do harm to Jesus, and even to kill Him, and they were using the Sabbath day in order to attain their end. The words, ‘to save life or to destroy it’ refers pointedly to them.

His words contrasted what He was about to do, with what they were about to do. He was going to do good, they were aiming to do harm, He was going to help a man live again, they were planning to have Him put to death. But He longed to help them too and He was pleading with them to consider and to ask themselves who was really in the right.

But His words also emphasised why He was here, it was so that through His word others too would begin to ‘do good’ and to ‘save life. So that others would cease to be withered. This was central to His message. As He would heal this withered hand, so did He long to restore the withered trees (Ezekiel 17.24) and withered bones (Ezekiel 37.2) of Israel (and none more withered than those He saw before Him). He longed that He might prophesy to them that they might live (Ezekiel 37.4).

‘Is it lawful.’ The Pharisees were very keen on describing something as ‘lawful’ or ‘unlawful’. They had only recently asked His disciples the same question in the grainfields. So Jesus gently hits back. They were concerned about what was lawful so He wanted them to consider whether they thought that what they were planning to do was lawful. As a technical phrase which they used for their final warning they should have taken especial note of it.

‘On the Sabbath.’ That day which God had set aside as life-giving and blessed. Surely if any day was a day for doing good, that one was.

‘To do good or to do harm.’ This was the crux. What should the right thinking person do when these alternatives were offered? Standing in the sight of God should he do good, or should he do harm? There were no doubt many common people there. They would be with Him. They would instinctively know the answer and may well not have realised what a fix the Rabbis were in. (And the Rabbis knew it).

The way the question is put is also illuminating. The Pharisees would have stated that they did not do harm by not healing on the Sabbath, they simply did nothing. Jesus reply is that not to do good when it can be done is actually to do harm. Doing nothing is doing harm. The tree that bears no fruit is no more use than the tree that produces bad fruit (13.6-9). It is cast into the fire (3.9; Matthew 7.19). ‘To him who knows to do good, and does it not, to him it is sin’ (James 4.17).

‘To save life or to kill.’ That was not a question about the man with his withered arm, as though he were in danger of death. Rather He had the aims of the Pharisees in mind, otherwise He could have stopped after ‘to do harm’. The crowds simply saw it as an added example to justify doing good on the Sabbath, but the guilty men present could hardly have avoided seeing the further implication.

6.10 ‘And he looked round about on them all, and said to him, “Stretch forth your hand.” And he did so, and his hand was restored.’

Then He looked round at them all, one by one, giving each an opportunity to reply. But all they did was glare back. Then He turned to the man, saying, “Stretch forth your hand.” He knew what He was doing. He knew what the reaction would be. But He knew that He had to do it. They were challenging His very authority to act as He was doing. They were seeking to make Him bend to the will of the Rabbis and admit that His claims at the previous incident had been excessive. But this He could not do, for He did have God’s authority to question the interpretations of the Rabbis. (Had He been a fellow Rabbi they might have accepted this once he had established a great reputation. But to them He was an outsider making great and dangerous claims. He was challenging their authority just as they were challenging His). So He recognised that He had no alternative to what He intended to do.

But in fact He ‘did’ nothing. As the man stretched forth his hand it was restored. So the question now was, Who had done it? Was it God, or Jesus, or both. The simple common folk knew that answer. It was both. The Pharisees and scribes too realised that they were trapped. What do you do in such a case? Jesus had not touched the man. All He had done was tell Him to stretch out his poor withered arm. As far as the evidence went God had done the work. But not a single person there doubted that Jesus had done it too.

6.11 ‘But they were filled with mad fury, and discussed together one with another what they might do to Jesus.’

So they were mad with blind fury. All they could think of was how they could get rid of this man who was such a bane on their lives. Neither His compassion, nor His power to work miracles, moved them. For here was a man who was guilty of the greatest crime that a man of that day could commit. He did not agree with them, and said so.

In view of the parallel in the chiasmus it is clear that Luke intends us to see that these men

were withered inside. Their inner hearts were not working properly. Their consciences were atrophied.

How could these men be so blind as not to see the truth? I remember as a schoolboy arriving home with a typical piece of schoolboy knowledge. My mother, eager that I should know the truth, fetched a book to show me that I was wrong. But I refused to look at it. She did not know what a blow it was to me to discover that all the books and encyclopaedias in the world were wrong on such an important matter. That is human nature. These men were simply like me. They wanted the truth to bend to fit into their pattern, and if it would not, they did not want to know.

This last incident has finalised this series of incidents from 5.1 onwards, which has revealed how Jesus fulfils in Himself many of the Old Testament figures and promises. It has done it by manifesting two vital things about Jesus, firstly that He has come supremely as the Doer of good and Saver of life, acting as a positive figure in a negative world, and secondly that He has come as the One Who can restore those of the withered Creation Who respond to Him, making them into fruitful trees and living bones, while those whose hearts are atrophied will oppose Him and seek to do away with Him. In the subsection that follows Luke will now move on in order to show how He is establishing the new Israel. But before that the foundation is laid in the calling of the Twelve Apostles.

The Laying Of The Foundation For The New Israel (6.12-6.19).

After revealing what He has come to be, Jesus now goes about establishing the new Israel. He appoints leaders for the twelve tribes (6.12-16). He proclaims a new Law (6.17-49). He provides a foretaste of the sending out of His power to the Gentiles (7.1-10). He raises the dead, a foretaste of the resurrection (7.11-17). He points to His signs and wonders in order to encourage John and as evidence that He is the promised One (7.18-33). And He is greeted by the prostitute who has been transformed, a vivid picture of the future restoration of Israel as described in Ezekiel 16.59-63.

Jesus Appoints the New Leaders of The Twelve Tribes (6.12-16 compare 22.30).

Jesus now chooses out twelve Apostles as the foundation of the new Israel, His new 'ekklesia' (Matthew 16.18; 18.17). The word means a gathering, church, congregation, and is a word regularly used in LXX of 'the congregation of Israel'. That this is the significance here comes out in 22.30. The Apostles have been chosen in order to watch over the true Israel. In the same way in John 15.1 Jesus reveals Himself as 'the true vine' in contrast to the false vine. The same idea is in mind there. Israel is a false vine, as it is often portrayed to be in the Old Testament (Isaiah 5.1-7; Jeremiah 2.21). Jesus, and those who will become one with Him are the true vine, the true Israel.

This stress on the church as being the new Israel is confirmed in Romans 11.17-27 where unbelieving Israel are cut out of the olive tree and new believers are grafted in; Galatians 6.16 where the church, God's new creation, are called 'the Israel of God'; Ephesians 2.11-22 where believing Gentiles, having been previously alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, have been brought near through the blood of Christ, and have become fellow-citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, and, on the foundation of the Apostles and prophets, become the Temple of God.

The passage may be analysed as follows:

- a Jesus went out into the mountain to pray, and He continued all night in prayer to God (12).
- b When it was day, He called his disciples, and He chose from them twelve, whom also He named Apostles (13).
- c Simon, whom he also named Peter, and Andrew his brother, and James and John,

and Philip and Bartholomew, and Matthew and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot, and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor (14-16).

- b He came down *with them*, and stood on a level place, and a great multitude of his disciples, and a great number of the people from all Judaea and Jerusalem, and the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon, who came to hear him, and to be healed of their diseases (17).
- a Those who were troubled with unclean spirits were healed, and all the multitude sought to touch Him, for power came forth from Him, and healed them all (18-19).

Note that in 'a' Jesus prays all night to God, and in the parallel unclean spirits were cast out and power came out from Him to heal all who touched Him. In 'b' He appoints twelve Apostles and in the parallel He identifies Himself with them as He joins the crowds along with them in order to continue what is now their joint preaching and healing ministry. Central in 'c' are the names of the twelve, the first is 'the Rock', the last is 'the Traitor'.

6.12 'And it came about in these days, that he went out into the mountain to pray; and he continued all night in prayer to God.'

We should note that prior to choosing the twelve Jesus went into the mountain to pray and continued all night with God. This is the only place where we are informed that He prayed all night. How far He had already made His selection in His mind we do not know, but He would not move without God's confirmation. That He should spend the whole night brings out how important He considered the choices to be. Each candidate would be sifted before God before acceptance.

6.13 'And when it was day, he called his disciples; and he chose from them twelve, whom also he named apostles.'

Having spent the night in prayer He now called all His disciples together, of whom there were a goodly number (He will shortly be able to send out seventy to preach), and out of them He chose twelve whom He called 'Apostles. A 'disciple' was someone who attached himself to a Teacher in order to learn from him. It was a closer association than just that of a student.

'Twelve whom also He named Apostles.' 'Apostolos', an apostle, is derived from *apostellein*, (to send forth,) and originally signified literally a messenger. The term was employed by earlier classical writers to denote the commander of an expedition, or a delegate, or an ambassador (see Herodotus, 5. 38), but its use in this way was later rare as it came to have a technical meaning referring to 'the fleet', and possibly also the fleet's admiral. It may be that Jesus spoke with a sense of humour when he used this term and named the fishermen 'Apostles', seeing them as the future 'catchers of men'. It would require that He gave the title in Greek, but He may well have done so because it tickled His sense of humour.

It may, however, be that He called each of them a *shaliach*, which was then translated as *apostolos*. A *shaliach* was a personal representative acting on behalf of another.

In the New Testament, apart from the Apostles, the term *apostolos* is also employed in a more general sense to denote important messengers sent out on God's service (see Luke 11.49; 2 Corinthians 8.23; Philippians 2.25; 1 Thessalonians 2.6), and in one instance is applied to Christ Himself, as the One sent forth from God (Hebrews 3.1). But in the main it is reserved for the twelve, James, the Lord's brother, and Paul and Barnabas (Acts 14.4, 14). Paul certainly saw it as giving him a recognised authority direct from Jesus Christ. He saw himself, along with the twelve, as being specifically commissioned by Jesus.

6.14 'Simon, whom he also named Peter, and Andrew his brother, and James and John, and Philip and Bartholomew,'

The list of the twelve is also found in Acts 1.13; Matthew 10-2-4; Mark 3.16-19, with slight variations. Many people in those days had two names, and Jesus may have given each a new

name as He did Peter. Peter always comes first in every list and Judas last. Thus there may be a deliberate contrast in Luke, 'Simon who is called a Rock, -- and Judas who became a traitor.' But 'became' makes clear that at first he was genuinely committed to following Jesus, even if it might have been for the wrong reasons.

Simon's new name of 'Peter' was first given to him when he met Jesus after being introduced to Him by Andrew in John 1.42. We must thus read it here as indicating 'Simon, to whom He had given the new name Peter'. The name given was actually the Aramaic Cephias (kepha) which meant a rock (John 1.42), but when translated into Greek it became petros (masculine - which means small rock) and not petra (feminine - a large foundation rock, rocky ground). This was, of course, because Simon was male. However the distinction was maintained in Matthew 16.18, where petros could have been used both times as a translation of kepha if Jesus had there been speaking in Aramaic. But there the switch is not to petros but to petra. This was in order to signify that the rock in mind there was either Peter's statement. Out of 76 of the early church fathers only 18 thought that the reference was to Peter, and that at a time when Peter was seen as prominent. Over forty applied it to the statement that he made.

Jesus chose Peter not only to be one of the twelve, but also to be one of the inner three, Peter, James and John (5.37; 9.2; 14.33). He clearly saw in him one who, once he had conquered his impetuosity and occasional unreliability (Mark 8.32-33; 14.37, 68, 70, 71; Galatians 2.11 following), would in the end prove to be a rock. Perhaps the giving of the name was intended to make him consider his need to do exactly this. He is always named first and became a natural leading figure among the twelve (8.40; 9.20, 32-33; 12.41; 18.28; Matthew 17.24; John 21.3; Acts 1.15; 2.14; 8.14 (with John)), but not officially so, or in such a way that he could not be challenged. See Acts 11.2-3 - where he had to back up his position with reason, not by claiming special personal God-given authority - see also Galatians 2.11.

With Peter He chose Andrew his brother and James and John. Along with James and John, Peter formed the inner three (see above). They have already been introduced to us previously in 5/1-11. It is likely that Jesus gave new names to all His disciples but the others tend to be ignored here, probably because they were not so prominent later on.

Philip was the first that we know of who was called to 'follow Me' (John 1.43). Bartholomew may be 'son of Ptolemy' or 'Talmi' and by his association here with Philip may quite likely be Nathanael (Bartholomew is not a first name). Nathanael may in fact not have been one of the Twelve, although John 21.2 may suggest that he was. It partly depends on what John meant there by 'disciple'.

6.15 'And Matthew and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called Zelotes, (or 'the zealous one'),'

Matthew is Levi, the son of Alphaeus, who was the toll collector mentioned in 5.27-32 (see Matthew 10.3). Thomas occasionally came into prominence (John 11.16; 14.5) but is best known for not having been present when the other equally doubting Apostles met the risen Lord in Jerusalem (John 20.24-27) and was therefore rather unfairly dubbed 'Doubting Thomas'. James the son of Alphaeus (who may be the James the Little of Mark 15.40) may have been brother to Levi the son of Alphaeus (Mark 2.14), although the name Alphaeus was fairly common. Simon is also called Zelotes, which means 'the zealous one'. It may be that he established a reputation for over-eagerness. The term Zealot, signifying insurrectionists against Rome, did not arise until later, although it is possible that the term was affectionately applied to him later by the Apostles because of his hotheadedness.

6.16 'And Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.'

Judas, the son of James ('Judas, not Iscariot' - John 14.22), is probably Thaddaeus, (which Matthew possibly has as Lebbaeus. This is, however, by no means certain as many manuscripts have Thaddaeus. One may have been a new name and one a nickname). Judas

Iscariot is always mentioned last because he betrayed Jesus. Luke specifically designates him as the one who became a traitor. If his name means man (ish) of Kerieth (which is by no means certain), he was the only Judean among the Apostles. It may, however, be that his name is derived from the Aramaic word seqar, 'falsehood', with a prosthetic aleph added.

6.17 'And he came down with them, and stood on a level place, and a great multitude of his disciples, and a great number of the people from all Judaea and Jerusalem, and the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon, who came to hear him, and to be healed of their diseases.'

Having chosen the twelve He then came down with all His disciples to a level place, quite probably still on the mountain. There He found a great crowd of disciples, people who came regularly to hear Him, and along with them hosts of people from all around, from Judaea and Jerusalem in the south, to Tyre and Sidon in the north. While there were many Jews in Tyre and Sidon there were also many Gentiles, and it is quite likely that Luke wants us to realise that Gentiles came too, and were welcome. Many had come in order to be healed.

6.18-19 'And those who were troubled with unclean spirits were healed. And all the multitude sought to touch him, for power came forth from him, and healed them all.'

Unclean spirits could not stand His presence. We are probably to see that those who were possessed were healed at His word. Uncleaness was being banished, and Satan's kingdom overthrown (compare 11.17-22). And the crowd pressed in to touch Him for the power came forth from Him, and it healed them all.