

Most Surely Believed Among Us

"Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean!"

LUKE CHAPTER FIVE

THE Gospel according to Luke fills in some details which we do not find elsewhere, conveying that message which the Spirit indicated in the opening verses of chapter 1—

"To declare the things which are most surely believed among us that thou mightest know the certainty of those things wherein thou hast been instructed."

The preservation of this record to our time is for the same purpose, that we might be founded on the Rock—

"The things which are most surely believed among us."

The apostle John terminated his gospel record with these words (after saying that there were many things not recorded which Christ had done)—

"But these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his Name" (John 20:31).

We read, early in Luke, of the birth of John the Baptist, of his growing up in the wilderness in the "power and spirit of Elias," and of the preparing of a way for the coming of his relative, Jesus.

We read of the instructions to Mary concerning the birth of her son, of his growing in power and stature, and favor with God and men, of his showing unto Israel by the declaration of God from heaven, following his immersion in the waters of Jordan—

"Thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness."

And he submitted (as we all must) to the waters of baptism, in obedience to Divine command. This was followed by God's public acknowledgement—

"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

We read of his genealogy, which takes us back to the beginning—

"The son of Adam, the son of God."

—born of the seed of the woman, yet by the direct operation of the power of the Spirit of God. This is the foundation upon which Luke builds his message of the "things most surely believed."

We find that Jesus came to Nazareth and, having entered the synagogue, when invited to read, he chose a portion of the prophet Isaiah, impressing his hearers with the words—

"This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears."

The sneering response indicated the nature of their reception of this declaration. And they were offended: they received him not—

"Is not this Joseph's son?" (Luke 4:22).

"Physician, heal thyself! Whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in thy country . . ."

"He did no mighty works there, except he healed a few sick folk."

He comes to the Jordan valley. He enters into the house of Simon Peter, whose acquaintance he had made at Bethabara, as recorded in John 1:41—

"Andrew findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias! (which is, being interpreted, the Christ)."

A generation was looking for the Messiah, but they did not realize the details concerning the Messiah. They did not realize that they needed a personal Savior from their own sins, as well as a national Messiah to exalt their nation.

We find him healing Peter's wife's mother. Again by this act a foundation was laid for a work that was to go on for many years, a foundation which appears in Luke 5. It is to this chapter we would now direct attention: v. 1 impresses us with the presence of an excited multitude—

"As the people pressed upon him to hear the Word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret."

They were eagerly waiting to hear what he had to say. A new Teacher in Israel!—with a message they had not heard from, and a manner they had not seen in, the Scribes and Elders of their nation. What is this word? They wanted to hear. It was a word of hope, and joy, and liberation.

It is interesting that Luke describes the lake as "Gennesaret," in contrast to Matthew and Mark who refer to it as the Sea of Galilee. "Gennesaret" is the Greek form of the Hebrew "Chinnereth" or "Chinneroth," which means "Harp" (from its harplike shape).

Here was the "harp" of the "Sweet Psalmist of Israel" which conveyed the joyful message of life to the people, even the Song of Moses and of the Lamb. So that the message should ring out clearly to all the throng, he goes out upon this water in Simon's fishing boat.

V. 3: *"He sat down, and taught the people."*

An ideal, interesting, and significant environment. Seated upon the waters, the Sea of Nations, he declares the Gospel sound, a new message, a message of hope from the God of Israel, ringing over the peaceful ripples of the Chinnereth: the "Harp of God."

Our minds carry back to the harpist David, as he composed and sang for Israel the beautiful Psalms, which so prophetically portray the Christ, the Savior of mankind, in suffering and in exaltation.

It would be just 3 years later, and this eager throng, with the rest of the multitude, would be clamoring for his death and crucifixion. They turned from him with fickle instability, for they were shallow-minded—

"Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas!" (Luke 23:18).

And we recall the occasion, as the end approached, when many of Christ's own disciples "went back and walked no more with him." Upon that occasion he turned to his closest circle of followers and asked them if they would also leave him. As spokesman for these few intimates, Peter replied—

"Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

"We believe and ARE SURE that thou art that Christ, the Son of the Living God" (John 6:68-9).

Let us realize that the Seed which was sown by Christ, as it went forth to this multitude as grain cast upon the waters, would—and yet WILL—bring forth the fruit which God wants.

There were 2 boats available upon this occasion. Christ chose one. There will never be a shortage of vessels to carry forth the work of God. The idle ships of the fishermen (who had gone out of them and were mending their nets) would be put to higher use—if waiting and available at the time God needs them.

And there is another sobering thought we are so frequently reminded of—one taken, and the other left—the issues of life and death. Let us, forgetting all else (for all else is vanity)—let us devote our whole lives to the effort of making ourselves ready to be fit vessels for the Master's use, so we may be among those few taken unto life, and not among the many left to death and corruption.

Christ has entered in upon our lives. We go forth upon the Lake of Gennesaret, and WE too are to sound forth the joyful sound.

Some will turn away their ears from the Truth, and be turned unto fables, that there may be a departure from the Faith. We may thus feel that our labors have been in vain. But let us hold fast to this rock-assurance: NO labor in the Lord is in vain, though there be but present disappointment and no apparent fruit, God will render the reward and the fruit as it pleases Him. Noah's labors were apparently fruitless, but not in vain.

Christ, having finished his discourse to the throng, now turns his attention to the humble fishermen who were mending their nets. These men had toiled the whole night before, without any results from their labor. Jesus observed the situation, and their failure, and commanded them—

"Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught."

Simon Peter replied to this injunction in a manner which exposed the state of mind of the fishermen (v. 5)—

"Master, we have toiled all the night and have taken nothing. Nevertheless, at thy word, I will let down the net."

Perhaps we have experienced the same empty results of our earnest and toilsome labors, and our minds are also disturbed and discouraged. The boat was available: it is also provided in our case. The sea of nations is there; and the fish are there. It is our duty to "let down the net," according to the Master's word. "Nevertheless, at thy command we will let down the net" should be our response, even in the face of seeming hopelessness and failure.

The fish were not visible. The sea looked just as it had looked when they toiled in it without result. The fish destined to be caught are not apparent to our eyes either, yet we must let down the net as we have been commanded, though we may be disturbed. When the disciples responded in obedience and faith to Christ's order—

"They enclosed a great multitude of fishes, and their net broke (was breaking: RV)"—v. 6

Simon beckoned unto his brethren to assist, and the result was unbelievable: both ships filled to the point that they were sinking. There were plenty of fish in the sea!—

"The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few."

But the laborers will be sufficient, and divinely provided, for the work to be done, as John records Jesus' prayer to the Father—

"Of those which Thou hast given me I have lost none" (John 17:12).

And as Mordecai reminded Esther in stirring exhortation—

"If thou, altogether boldest thy peace at this time, then shall deliverance arise to the Jews from another place, but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed."

Not one step of the divine purpose can fail or be frustrated. There need be no concern on our part that THIS ship will ever sink.

There was another occasion when the disciple thought the boat would sink, but the Master was in the boat with them, and they were safe. He may not be visible to our naked eye, but he will be there, and with him there, there will be no danger of foundering.

Peter was deeply awed and humbled by these circumstances, and exclaimed (v. 8)—

"Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"

He had been looking for the Messiah. He had witnessed the miracle of the instantaneous healing of his mother-in-law. He now feels his insufficiency for the highness of the calling and the vastness of the work—just like Moses, who pleaded (Ex. 4:12-13)—

"O my Lord, send I pray Thee by the hand of whom Thou wilt send!"

This brought God's anger. Why? Because of Moses' humility? No. But because of his failure to realize that the work was to be GOD'S work; that the choice of him was GOD'S choice, GOD'S

will—and the refusal was his—man's—will; because of his failure to realize that no MAN is anything; the man is incidental, for the power must be of God—

"Who made man's mouth? Or Who maketh the dumb, or the deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the Lord?"

"Now therefore GO! And I will be with thy mouth, and will teach thee what thou shalt say."

God will provide such ability and means as He sees fit. Let us just get on with the work, as commanded. Usually man's supposed "humility" is sloth, or natural reluctance, or perverted pride seeking flattery, or some other disguised and deceptive weakness of the flesh.

The other disciples beside Peter were impressed. The result of this incident (which was repeated at the end of Christ's ministry) was the same as that again experienced on the same lake by the same disciples. Then again, they toiled all night, and caught nothing. Said Christ on that occasion—

"Cast on the RIGHT side of the ship" (John 21:6)

And they immediately caught 153 great fishes. In both instances, adequate provision was made for the present, so that the preaching of the Word and the following of the Master would be unhampered. God will add the necessary things of life as they are required for the fulfilling of HIS work, but not merely for OUR convenience and comfort.

The disciples were astonished. They could not comprehend the magnitude of the power they were witnessing. Jesus said—

"Fear not: from henceforth thou shalt catch men" (v. 10).

"Fear not!" Luke had already recorded that reassuring expression being used in divine exhortation several times before: "Fear not, Zacharias," "Fear not, Mary," "Fear not, shepherds"—instances of the angel of God speaking to faithful individuals.

Thus Christ assured them to have confidence in him.

V. 11: *"They forsook all, and followed him."*

This was the turning point in their lives. Though they had many setbacks, many anxieties, and many more lessons to learn, they continued to follow him. All that we have, all our efforts, must be directed toward this one end of serving God. Christ becomes our example and our pattern. This is what is being impressed upon us as we partake of the memorials: it MUST be. 1 Cor. 11:1—

"Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ."

Paul followed in the steps of his Master. He bore in his body the marks of the Lord Jesus. Do we? What have we to show in the service of the Lord? Paul said (Col. 1:24)—

"I rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ, in my flesh for his Body's sake."

Paul tells us we must do the same; that we must enter into his tribulations, and thereby we shall enter into his glory (2 Cor. 1:4-5). There must be a complete change of life, an entire alteration and transformation of all earthly characteristics, a wholly "new creature."

To impress this lesson, Luke proceeds to give another illustration. A man that is a leper appears on the scene. This man was of a different type from that we read of in the Law of Moses in the case where leprosy covers the whole body, and the man is declared clean.

This man was "full of leprosy": a loathsome and a pitiful sight. He was an unclean person. As such, he came to Jesus with full belief of what Jesus could do. Here was far more comprehension and humility than any had yet shown. He fell at Jesus' feet, and said—

"Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean!"

No question or doubt about the power of God, no thought of possibility that Jesus might fail in an attempt to cure him of his leprosy. He was absolutely sure he could—

"If thou wilt... Not my will, but thine be done."

And Christ put forth his hand touched him, and he was healed; he was made clean—
"And immediately the leprosy departed from him."

Leprosy is a type of the condition of the whole human race. That is why Moses, through the Spirit of God, has devoted so much time to tell us about leprosy, to tell us what is necessary in the cleansing process, to teach us in type and shadow what is accomplished in Christ, to instruct us of our natural, unclean, death-stricken condition, to teach us to humble ourselves.

After the leper was made clean, Jesus said to him—

"Go show thyself unto the priest and offer for the cleansing according to what Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them" (v. 14).

What had to be done? A sacrifice had to be made. Part of the blood of the sacrifice was put on the right ear of the cleansed leper, upon the thumb of his right hand, and upon the great toe of his right foot. Here was the "hearing," the "doing," the "walking," the mark of Christ upon his every action.

Again the anointing oil, taken from the priest's hand, had to be touched on his right ear, his right thumb, and his right great toe. This was to signify that it was the Spirit of God doing the work through him, and not the man himself. Hearing, working and walking all to one end: the glory of God.

The leper obeyed Jesus, and it would be a testimony to those priests of the Mosaic economy who did the service upon this leper. He would be known and recorded as being a leper, for it was the priests' duty to examine and pronounce upon leprosy. Here he comes back to them for the ceremonial cleansing, and the very fact of it being required would be a great witness and testimony of the work of God in their midst.

The result of this open testimony of the power of God in Israel was that a great multitude came together to hear Christ's words, and also to be healed. They knew they needed a natural healing, but did not (in most cases) realize their need for spiritual healing.

V. 16: *"He (Jesus) withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed."*

This teaches us that he had done much work; that the Spirit of God had gone out from him. To heal and to cleanse took effort. It will take effort on our part, and we will feel weary with the work. To increase our faculties, and to prepare for further activity, we must—like Christ—draw strength from the proper Source.

He prayed—in secret, in the wilderness. If this was necessary for Christ, God's Own Son, possessing the Spirit without measure, then surely it is necessary for us! We recall the apostle's words (Heb. 5:7):

"Who, in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save him from death.. and was heard in that he feared."

Christ revered (feared) God as the Source by which the work would go on. And thus he prayed earnestly for strength, and because he prayed, he received strength. How can we expect to be heard and helped, if we do not likewise pray "with strong crying and tears"?

The succeeding verses, 17-26, speak of another incident, with the purpose of showing the work of Christ upon us; to make us realize the certainty of the things wherein we have been instructed.

These incidents, said Luke, had come from "eye-witnesses." Luke had not seen them himself, but they had been conveyed to him by "eye-witnesses." They have come to us, through the mercy of

God, in correct form by the over-riding preservation of the Spirit of God, through 2000 years of men's attempts to suppress the Divine record.

What do we next see? A man is brought on a bed, or pallet; a man completely helpless, unable to do anything for himself. He was paralyzed. He was carried by 4 friends. They had full assurance of the healing power of Christ: there was no question in their minds. In these incidents, the power and necessity of faith is being emphasized. The "four" speaks of those who are called in faith from the 4 quarters of the earth.

When they come, they find similar circumstances to those experienced by Joseph and Mary when Christ was born. There was no room to receive them; but God made room—in the manger. And thus Christ was born: the Son of God, the Heir of all things—now exalted above all principality and power. We must make room for him in our lives, if we would live with him. So often he comes, and quietly knocks—and there is no room for him. How sad!

These men would not be deterred by anything standing in the way—the same attitude we find Luke recording of those sorrowful but determined women who went to Jesus' sepulchre to anoint his dead body. And they found that the stone, which had seemed such a formidable obstacle to their loving purpose, had been rolled away.

These men, unable to get in the door because of the crowd, went up upon the housetop. We must picture in our minds the eastern houses, with their flat roofs and outside stairs leading up to them. They could not get to Christ the natural way, so they entered into his presence by a means which was from above.

They tore open the roof, doubtless to the consternation of those below in the room, and gently lowered their sick friend into the presence of Jesus. Utter single-mindedness to the task, and complete faith that Christ would provide. Would we have persevered so doggedly?

And what would we think, brethren and sisters, to be witnessing such things: a man in full faith, with his companions making such an effort to do this for him, and we would be before Christ, and we would humbly ask him to heal us of our infirmity, and he would say:

"Man, thy sins be forgiven thee."

Is that all he is going to do for us? Would we feel that our great manifestation of faith and evidence of trust had been rebuffed—that in such circumstances it was unjust and unkind for Christ to call our sins into remembrance?

Would we realize, as this man did, that there was no intention of offense, but that leprosy, and palsy, and all infirmities and diseases which we suffer from our youth (until death terminates our service) are all the results of sin: not necessarily our own, but a product of that nature which sinned from the beginning. Sin and disease are inseparably connected.

Step by step we are led to the grave, but in that process God is teaching us, if we have ears to hear, of resurrection and life beyond the grave—the bird dipped in blood and then turned free in the beautiful ceremony of the cleansing of the leper.

God is teaching us that we are all lepers, and that we cannot save ourselves; but that He has, in His love, provided a way of liberation from this leprous condition of sin and death.

This incident of the palsied man provided a declaration of the fact that Christ came not only to heal, but also to provide forgiveness of sins. Upon this pronouncement of the Master's the Pharisees in indignation exclaimed within themselves—

"Who is this which speaketh blasphemies! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

Christ, knowing their thoughts, then went on to implant this very important truth (vs. 23-4)—

"Which is easier: to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk?"

*"But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins (he saith unto the sick of the palsy),
"I say to thee, Arise, take up thy couch, and go into thine house."*

The man arose immediately, unaided by his companions now, and departed to his own house, glorifying God for such a wonderful blessing.

Christ had set before the Pharisees undeniable evidence that he who could heal could—based on this evidence of Divine power—forgive sins also. This was the foundation of all God's works in Christ Jesus, that there would be a day when sin, disease (and even their grim ultimate result, death) would be removed—

"The WAGES (fair recompense) of sin is death, but the GIFT of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23).

It was quite as easy to do one as the other, with the power of God. Jesus was the manifestation of God walking in their midst. All he did were the works of God among them, and he could forgive sins because he spoke the mind of the Father. But his declaration offended them because they—

"Knew not the voices of the prophets which were read every day in their synagogues."

But the common people were amazed, and rightfully ascribed the glory to God. They were filled with reverence and said—

"We have seen strange things today!" (v. 26).

* * *

Now we look at the concluding thought of this chapter. Christ continues his selection of those who would work with him during his ministry and continue the labor after he had ascended to his Father's right hand.

It is important that we realize that our actions and conduct are observed by many others. People are always observing and watching what is happening. Thus we become witnesses for the Truth of God. What we do will be remembered for good or ill by those around us. If it is good, it is to God's glory; but if evil, it is to our shame.

Christ comes upon another individual, of a class despised by the Pharisees: a tax collector, a publican, a customs officer, one who was in the service of their Gentile overlord, the Roman authorities. Christ abruptly said to this man (Levi, or Matthew)—

"FOLLOW ME!" (v. 27).

Without any questioning, and just as suddenly (v. 28), Levi—

"Left all, rose up, and followed Jesus."

Obviously Levi had been observing, had noted what was going on, and was mentally prepared for this summons. There will come a time when, just as suddenly, we shall be summoned to "Rise up, leave all, and follow me!" Will we be immediately ready, or will there be a fatal looking back?

We are not here shown in Levi a mere blind "faith." We are shown the effect of evidence upon an open and thoughtful mind.

His name "Levi" is interesting, because it takes our minds back to Jacob's third son, born of Leah. Leah had declared at his birth:

"Now will my husband be joined unto me, because I have borne him 3 sons. Therefore was his name called Levi (Joined)"—Gen. 29:34.

His other name was "Matthew" from the Hebrew "Mattathias," meaning "The Gift of Yahweh." God had presented the "gift" of life unto him, and he was "joined" unto the assembly of those who in the future age would each rule over one of the tribes of Israel, regathered into the Promised Land.

We too have been "joined" unto the same Body. We too have been given the "gift of God," and certainly we have been given a wonderful gift in the example of Matthew in this record.

There was no small-handedness about Levi. He made a "great feast" (v. 29) for his Master, his new Master. Of his substance he gave unto the Lord. He assembled a "great company" of publicans and sinners to express his thanksgiving for what had been done for him, and to proclaim to them the true riches he had found, that they too might follow Jesus.

The Pharisees and Scribes, still remembering the embarrassment they had received in the incident of the paralytic man, spoke not to Christ direct, to his disciples—

"Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners?" (v. 30).

Another lesson is put forth by Christ who is aware of their criticism (v. 31)—

"They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick."

If we feel that we are righteous, that we are whole or complete, then we should be getting on with the work of preaching the Word to them who are "publicans and sinners" in our estimation.

But these men, these Pharisees, were righteous in their own eyes, in their own esteem. They had, as Paul said to the Romans (10:3), "gone about to establish their OWN righteousness," but they had not submitted to GOD'S righteousness.

Christ teaches us how to attain this righteousness. The submissive faith and humility manifested in these incidents recorded by Luke is to teach us in this regard (v. 32)—

"I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

* * *

Based on the feast prepared by Levi for his Master, other lessons are presented (v. 33)—

"Why do the disciples of John (the Baptist) fast often, and the disciples of the Pharisees, but thine eat and drink?"

A foundation is again laid. The Bridegroom was in their midst, though they knew it not. How out of place to be mourning and weeping, while Christ was among them! This speaks of his final return to go no more away, of the joy and the happiness which will be brought to the ends of the earth in the glorious Kingdom Age.

But there would be a time for mourning, for weeping, and for fasting, which was to be a time of preparation for the final coming of the Bridegroom to the Marriage Feast (of which Levi's rejoicing occasion was a type). That time of preparation has been from the ascent of Christ to his Father's right hand, continuing through the present, to the glorious day of his reappearing—

"Can the children of the bridechamber fast while the Bridegroom is with them?"

"But the days will come when the Bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast in those days"

(vs. 34-5).

This is an important lesson for us. We are admonished by Paul not to partake of the world's rioting and drunkenness, but rather to put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and to make no provision for the flesh.

This, however, is not acceptable to the natural man. The world has sought out its own righteousness, its own means of fasting and external manners of showing its own ideas and concepts of righteousness, for its own glory.

But in the true fasting for Christ's coming, we are instructed to follow the pattern of putting aside of the flesh, the crucifixion of the Old Man, and rising to newness of life. It becomes (if an acceptable fast) a complete dedication of our lives to serve God and not ourselves. There must be a complete change from the natural form of living; a building of our lives on that sure foundation which is Christ: that foundation of which Luke says—

"Which is most surely believed among us."

Jesus enlarges the lesson by presenting it in another form. Men do not take a piece of new cloth and patch it into an old garment. There is no strength, no harmony, no fitness, no acceptable combination that will work in this fashion—

"Otherwise the new maketh a rent, and the piece that was added agreeth not with the old" (v. 36).

There can be no harmony between the way of the flesh and the way of the Spirit: the Old and the New. There must be a complete change of garment, a removal of the fig-leaf covering of the flesh to the coat-of-skin covering of Christ, which is typified in the memorials of the body and blood of Christ, as we break the loaf in remembrance together each week "until he come."

Once more Luke links Jesus' remarks with the feast of Matthew. Men do not take new wine and put it into old bottles (old skin bottles which are dried and withered), for in the process of the strong working of the vigorous new wine, it will burst the old bottles, and both wine and bottles will be lost.

Again, we must make provision for the wine of the Truth of God, entering into our hearts, a New Body—

"Buried with him by baptism into death, and risen like him into newness of life . ."
—new skins, new coverings, provided by God. V. 38—

"New wine must be put into new bottles: and both are preserved."
—preserved unto life everlasting, if we take the proper container, and if we take the Spirit-Word, the Gospel wine of the Word of God, and put it where it belongs—into a NEW HEART.

"No man also, having drunk old wine, straightway desireth new: for he saith, The old is better" (v. 39).

Here is the tendency to hold on to that which is natural. Once more Luke takes us back in mind to Matthew's feast, and its many lessons. The old wine (the Mosaic Law), Israel wanted to retain, which they felt was better.

But Christ—the new message, the new wine set before them, the spirit and fulfilment of the Law—was much better. He was the substance, the Law only the shadow. Without him, the Law was nothing, accomplished nothing, perfected nothing.

We must realize that the new wine, in its process of working, as all things do in God's economy, will develop into that which in the eyes of God is best.

The lessons, therefore, of Luke are to teach us the better way: the foundation of the "things which are most surely believed among us. And thereby we can attain unto life; not by the works of the flesh, which only tend to death, and have no real satisfaction even in this life, far less in that which is to come. Said Paul—

"In my flesh dwelleth no good thing."

That is the leprous condition of all flesh. We are unable, in this state of being, to help ourselves. Spiritually we are by nature completely paralyzed—completely helpless. It is only by a humble recognition of our helplessness that it is possible for our paralyzed condition to be healed by what has been accomplished for us by God through Jesus Christ our Lord—

"We can do all things through Christ who strengthened us!"

—E.F.H.