

Luke 4:42 - 5:16 // An Unexpected Saviour

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Date: 31 August 2025

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[0 : 00] Our reading this morning is found on page 1031, Luke chapter 4 and beginning to read at 42.

! At daybreak Jesus went out to a solitary place. The people were looking for him and when they came to where he was. They tried to keep him from leaving them but he said, I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also because that is why I was sent. And he kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea. One day as Jesus was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God. He saw at the water's edge two boats left there by the fishermen who were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore.

Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat. When he had finished speaking he said to Simon, put out into deep water and let down the nets for a catch.

[1 : 15] Simon answered, Master we worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.

When they had done so they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them.

And they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, Go away from me Lord, I am a sinful man.

For he and all his company were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken. And so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners.

Then Jesus said to Simon, Don't be afraid. From now on you will fish for people. So they pulled their boats up on the shore, left everything and followed him.

[2 : 17] While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the ground and begged him, Lord, if you are willing you can make me clean.

Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. I am willing, he said, be clean. And immediately the leprosy left him.

Then Jesus ordered him, Don't tell anyone but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for you, for your cleansing as a testimony to them.

Yet the news about him spread all the more so that crowds of people came to hear him. and to be healed of their illnesses. But Jesus often drew to lonely places and prayed.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Thank you, Ruth. Thank you, Ruth. Thank you, Ruth. Thank you, Ruth. Thank you, Ruth, very much for reading. I think I'm on.

[3 : 20] Am I on? Not on. Yes, on. Outstanding. Good. Do keep your Bible open, please, at Luke chapter 4.

You'll find also, if you want to make use of it, in the little outline in the handout to help you follow along. Let's pray as we come through to God's word together.

Heavenly Father, we thank you very much indeed for these words about Jesus. And we pray, please, that as we look at him, revealed in his word, you will help us to see him more clearly.

And you will help us to see ourselves in relation to him more clearly. These things we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Human beings have a great fascination with firsts.

The first time something happens. So many firsts. Firsts. First time somebody sailed around the world. Ferdinand Begellen, 1519.

[4 : 29] It was a long time ago. First time somebody spends time in space. First man on the moon. First man to run a mile in under four minutes.

First person to get to the South Pole. However it goes. And we love firsts. Well, this is a fascinating passage from this morning. And they're not geographical firsts. But there are two really big firsts in this passage in Luke's Gospel.

One of the most striking things about this passage is how the parts belong together. Just look at how that is for a moment. Do you notice how it starts and how it ends in the same way?

Look at chapter 4 verse 42. Jesus goes to a solitary place. People are looking for him. They try to keep him from leaving. But he moves on.

You can see the same thing in verse 15 in chapter 5. Crowds of people coming to him. But he often withdraws from them to pray. And there's a bit of a tension here, isn't there?

[5 : 35] At the beginning and the end of this episode. Between what people want from him. And what they get from him. So the beginning and the end belong together.

And interestingly, the bits in between also belong together with each other. We have two miracles. A fishing miracle. And there's a leprosy miracle.

Superficially, very different. But the closer you look, the more they have in common. Did you notice in both sections, people fall down in front of Jesus?

Verse 8. Peter falls at his knees. Verse 12. The leper falls face down in front of him. And in both cases, these people address Jesus as Lord.

Go away from me, Lord. Lord, if you're willing, you can make me clean. Now folks, that is the first momentous first in this passage.

[6 : 37] Perhaps not a surprise for us to hear Jesus referred to as Lord. But this is the first time in this Gospel that a human being addresses Jesus as Lord.

And it happens in both miracles. So there's a togetherness about the two miracles. Now just keep a finger in chapter 4. And flip back to the beginning of Luke's Gospel.

To chapter 1, please. Right at the start of his book. Right at the beginning. Luke writes to Theophilus. We don't know who he is.

A friend, an acquaintance. And he writes to his friend. And says he's put together, verse 3. A carefully researched and orderly account.

So that, verse 4. Theophilus will know the certainty of the things that he has been taught. This is supposed to be a confidence building book for those reading it.

[7 : 39] Now notice, this section we're in bears all the hallmarks of that careful construction. The bits hang together. The beginning and the end belong together.

The miracles in the middle belong together. So the question I think for this morning is. How does this part of Luke's Gospel. His careful account.

Build confidence. As part of this confidence building book. Well, I've called the title of this sermon. An unexpected saviour.

And we're going to look at it under two headings. An unexpected saviour. Heading number one. He pursues an agenda. That we would not pursue. Last week, we met the idea that Jesus is a proclaimer.

Just turn back to chapter 4, please. Chapter 4, verse 18. Jesus, right at the start of his public ministry. Preaches in the synagogue at Nazareth.

[8 : 43] And he uses the words of the prophet Isaiah. Chapter 4, verse 18. Verse 21. Verse 21.

In your hearing. I am the one. That Isaiah promised so long ago. The one anointed with God's spirit. To proclaim.

Momentous news. Of God's favour. Towards captive. Blind. Oppressed. Under judgment people. That promised day of God's favour.

That's not me. That's not me, but him. And most of Jesus' public ministry is focused on proclaiming that he is the one who is God's promised rescuer.

Now, our passage. Just turn back to our passage. Our passage bristles with Jesus' proclaiming activity. Look at verse 43.

[10 : 15] I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also. Because that is why I was sent. And he kept on preaching.

Or chapter 5, verse 1. Verse 1. People are crowding round, listening to the word of God. That is his words. Verse 3. He sat down and taught the people from the boat.

He's teaching. Verse 4. When he had finished speaking to them, he spoke to Simon. Put out into deep water and let down the nets for a catch.

Now, let me say, that is a bold thing to say to a tired fisherman. At the end of a fishless night. Don't you think?

Not only has he commandeered his boat as a pulpit. He's saying, have another go, Simon. One writer puts it like this. We need not ask what goes through the mind of a professional fisherman in a foul mood.

[11:20] When a non-fisherman orders him to do again in bad circumstances. What he's already tried and failed to do in good circumstances. And that captures very nicely the tone of verse 5.

Look at verse 5. Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so.

But the miracle that follows is just huge, isn't it, for a fisherman? Two boats fall. The nets are shredded. The boats nearly sink.

It's a life-changing haul of fish. It would have been a financially life-changing haul of fish. But notice the miracle is not in the rescue.

Sorry, the rescue. Yeah, the miracle is not the rescue. That's not the rescue that Jesus is bringing. Jesus isn't bringing material security to fishermen who listen to his words.

[12:24] No, the miracle demonstrates the power of the speaker's words. Because you say so. Well, alright. And look what happens.

And the miracle points not just to the speaker's power, but to his identity. Depart from me, Lord, says Peter.

This speaker has power over the created order. He can make all the fish dive into the net.

The fisherman learns that to listen to his words is to listen to one who speaks and acts as Lord.

Now, so far in Luke, that word Lord has been used many, many times.

If you want to follow it through chapters one to four. But it's used to refer to God. This is the first time in this gospel that anyone addresses Jesus with God language.

[13:29] Now, the second miracle points in exactly the same way to Jesus striking identity. Though he does it in a different way.

A leper comes to him, falls on his face before Jesus, begging to become clean. There is an example in the Old Testament of a Syrian general called Naaman.

Who's told that there's a prophet in Israel who can help him with his leprosy problem. And the king of Syria sends his very valuable general to the king of Israel with a letter saying, please fix my general.

And the king of Israel says, am I God that I can kill and make alive? You see, in the Bible, leprosy is not a king sized problem. It's a God sized problem.

Which makes the words in verse 12 really very extraordinary. On his face, on the ground, in front of Jesus, he says, Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.

[14:38] Be clean. Words addressed to a human being. And the words come back. Be clean. And he was made clean. Do you see, these two miracles demonstrate the power of the words of the preacher.

And also they demonstrate who the preacher is. These are the words of God. Now folks, there are so many, so many good things that could be pursued in this world by human beings.

If we had the resources, the money, the power, the opportunity. We live in such a needy world.

Notice that Jesus has the power.

Here, over food, over incurable sickness. He could, couldn't he, feed the world. He could cure cancer.

He could empty all the hospitals if he was so minded. If we had that kind of power, those are exactly the sorts of things that we would do with it.

[15:52] But he doesn't. For the agenda that he is pursuing is teaching people about himself. Who he is.

What he's come to do. This is an unexpected savior, isn't it? Counterintuitively, he's first and foremost a proclaimer of a message about himself.

And the miracles are not the rescue. They serve the proclamation of who he is and what he's come to do. And so his agenda is not one that we would pursue ourselves, left to ourselves.

We use the power to feed the world, to heal the world. He uses the power to proclaim who he is.

What sort of savior he is. Now that tension is right here in this passage, isn't it?

People come to him because he heals and he casts out evil spirits. That's what draws them. It's unsurprising. They don't want him to go away somewhere else.

[16:56] They'd rather he stayed here and did more of that. But that's not why he came. So he goes away somewhere else. And do you notice that there's the beginning of him commissioning others to do the same in this passage?

Peter, from now on, you're going to be the fisher of people. And in chapter 9, Peter and the rest of the 12 are sent out to do the same proclaiming work that Jesus has been doing.

And in chapter 10, he sends out 72 others to do the same proclaiming work that he's been doing.

And in Acts chapter 2, Peter, the big spokesman of the 12, his first activity on the day of Pentecost is to proclaim a message about Jesus.

How does the fishing happen by speaking words about Jesus to people? You see, this one who himself pursues an unusual agenda appoints others to pursue an unusual agenda in the world. Now, how might this unusual agenda message help Theophilus in his confidence in what he's heard?

[18:12] Well, I think Theophilus needs to know not just that the words he's been taught about Jesus are true, handed down by Jesus to Peter and the apostles, but that the teaching of the message about Jesus is what he needs and what other people need.

In other words, Theophilus, like us, needs to have confidence that Jesus' methods are right. So much of what Jesus has done and continues to do is seriously counterintuitive, isn't it?

He spent all that time teaching. He has all that power but doesn't use it to heal the world. He lets himself be killed.

He entrusts his world-altering message to Galilean fishermen and other unlikely people. And by the time Theophilus has started to take Jesus seriously, Jesus is long gone from the world.

And most of the people who follow him are doing nothing special, are nothing special in the world's eyes. Would you do things like this if you were the saviour of the world?

[19:30] And like Jesus, the Christians teach. And just as happened with him, people often don't really care about his teaching and would rather Christians spend more time fixing things.

Jesus' methods are so counterintuitive. Theophilus needs to know, and we need to know, that he knows what he's doing.

He knows what his followers should be doing. Why does Jesus so often take himself away from the crowds to pray?

Well, I take it, given the context, that his solitude and prayer was what enabled him to continue to pursue that counterintuitive, unusual agenda.

This is the most compassionate human being who's ever lived. Don't you think he felt the pull of the obvious needs in front of him?

[20:33] Don't you think it was a temptation to stay there and keep healing and keep feeding and doing all that stuff? Rather than going on doing the preaching thing. Well, if he felt that pull, we will too.

There's an agenda here. It's not one we would naturally go towards ourselves. Not an agenda we would normally pursue. Secondly, this section highlights a need that we wouldn't naturally centralise.

If the miracles don't provide the rescue, what is the rescue and what's the need being met? Well, what does Jesus' proclaiming ministry gravitate towards in this passage and in the rest of this book?

The power of his words reveals the greatness of his person. People call him Lord in this passage. And in this passage and increasingly in this book, as Jesus is revealed for who he is, the human problem is also revealed for what it is.

And that happens in both of these miracles in different ways. Let's look at the first. Look at verse 8. When Simon Peter saw this, the boat's sinking of the veloda fish, he fell down and said, Go away from me, Lord.

[22:01] I am a sinful man. Do you notice the change? A few minutes before he was saying, Oh, well, okay, we'll have a go. Now he's saying, Please go away.

I'm a sinful person. What's changed? Well, I think the glimpse of Jesus that he's had in this powerful miracle is just terrifying for him.

In the presence of divine speech and activity, Simon sees himself suddenly as a corrupt person and falls down in terror.

And as this gospel progresses and Jesus preaches and reveals himself to people, the human problem is revealed more and more clearly.

But the beginnings of it are in this passage. Depart from me. I'm a sinful man. I used to work as a doctor. And I spent a stint working in a cardiology department in a hospital in London.

[23 : 05] And from time to time, if I was on call at night, I'd have occasion to get something from the cardiology department, which was in the basement. And the same thing happened every time.

The lights were all off. I had a key. I opened the door. I flipped the lights on. And all the cockroaches, which had been lounging around in the darkness, died for cover. When you switch the lights on, the cockroaches go and hide.

Let me assure you, I'm sure Glasgow hospitals don't have any cockroaches. Really. When Jesus is seen for who he is, sinful human beings die for cover.

But look at the words that this terrifying Lord speaks in verse 10. Don't be afraid. Isn't that a wonderful thing?

Don't be afraid, sinful man. I've come to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. That's what I've come to proclaim. Don't be afraid. I'm going to deal with your sins.

[24 : 10] I'm going to make you a fisherman. A different sort of fisherman. Of course, we're not yet told in this passage how Jesus is going to deal with sins and enact God's favor. The route to Jesus' death on the cross occupies many more chapters of this book.

But in this episode, we're already on the route to that gracious rescue. Don't be afraid. And I think that wonderfully gracious emphasis is here in the second miracle as well.

Uncleanness in Jewish law is not the same sin. Under the law of Moses, everything in Israelite society belongs in one of three categories.

At the center of national life. The holy category. Things in and around the temple in Jerusalem. Things to do with God's presence among his people.

Around that, clean things. The clean zone. Things accessible to ordinary people most of the time. And then there's the outside category.

[25 : 16] The far away category. The unclean zone. Unclean things can have absolutely no contact at all with holy things.

And the way the system works is that in the ordinary course of ordinary life, people and things tend to become unclean.

Various things make you unclean. Some sicknesses do. Loss of bodily fluids does. Bumping into moldy things.

Or contact with anything to do with death. These are things that bump you. You bump into in the course of everyday life. But they make you unclean.

And if you're unclean, you have to do time out. You can't come into normal society. And you often have to provide sacrifices to become clean again.

[26 : 12] And uncleanness is contagious. It's catching. If you touch an unclean thing, you have to do time out. You become unclean. Now why is this? What are these categories for?

Well I think they serve as a massive, national, spatial illustration of the human sin problem. Things gravitate towards exclusion from God's presence.

Now there are some things which make a person unclean as long as they continue. And leprosy is one of those things.

This man is permanently unclean. Permanently excluded from society. Never able to go anywhere near the temple.

But he's seen and heard enough about Jesus to say quite extraordinary things. Lord, if you, a human being, are willing, you can make me clean.

[27 : 21] And in response, an unimaginably gracious touch. When was the last time this man was touched by anyone? And very gracious words.

I am willing. Be clean. And he was. Now there are many needs in our world, aren't there? Many needs.

But Jesus resolutely pursues an agenda that we wouldn't. And centralises a need that we tend to ignore. The biggest, biggest human need.

Sin and the need for its forgiveness. To be cleansed from our corruption. And his attitude towards sin and forgiveness is made so wonderfully clear and reassuring.

And it happens in just these few words. Do not be afraid. And I am willing. Be clean.

[28 : 22] Well, two things as we close. First, this is just a great morning for the person who's afraid that their sinfulness is too big for Jesus.

You might be just looking in on the Christian message for the first time. Looking in from the outside. Not yet a follower of Jesus. And all too aware of the fact that you've already messed up in life. Done things even that you're ashamed of. Have no thought that anyone who really knew you on the inside could possibly be well disposed towards you. Jesus says to Peter, Don't be afraid, sinful man.

You don't need to be terrified by me. You may have been a friend of Jesus for many years. And you almost certainly, therefore, have found that the more you see of Jesus, the more you become aware of the corruption that belongs to you.

Your failures, your shortcomings, the things you never even dreamt you had inside. Jesus says, Don't be afraid, sinful man, sinful woman.

[29 : 29] Keep trusting me. I will make you utterly clean in the end. You see, Jesus teaches about himself because he alone is the solution to this end problem.

And our need for forgiveness from God. That's the first thing. Second thing. What's the appropriate response to this one whose agenda is so different? Well, I think we get a little model of it in verse 11.

And interestingly, this is the second first in this book. We've had the first first already. People calling Jesus Lord. The second first is this. Don't be afraid, says Jesus, verse 10.

From now on you will fish for people. So they pulled their boats up on shore and left everything and followed him. The second first is that these are the first people to follow Jesus.

For him, the road he was on led to his death on the cross. For them, following him was also cross-shaped.

[30 : 37] Now we almost certainly won't all become travelling teachers and evangelists as they did. But there is an all-in-ness about this response, isn't there?

Everything they have is left behind. The whole of their lives at his disposal. And so it's worth measuring our response to him against that, isn't it?

Today, what is my life for, actually? Who is my life for? Whose agenda is my life reflecting? Still pursuing my own small agendas? Or sold out with my brothers and sisters to Jesus' big agenda?

Well, let's pray together. Let's pray. Do not be afraid, says Jesus.

[31 : 48] I've come to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. I am willing to make the unclean clean.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for this careful and orderly account. And we thank you for the glimpse it gives us into Jesus' agenda and the power of his words and the greatness of this person. And we pray, please, that you'll help us seeing him more clearly, to see ourselves more clearly, and to be confident that he is the place for our confidence, for our hope, and that his agenda is the one to be pursued.

We ask these things in his name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.