

## JESUS THE EXPERT

Luke 5:1–26 (17–26)

My title is Jesus the expert. In his Gospel Luke takes us through various stages of the ministry of Jesus and chapter 5 marks a new stage. It begins with three stories about Jesus and in each story his ministry brings him into the area of an expert or a number of experts in a particular field.

The first story is in verses 1 to 11. Here the field of expertise is a very practical one. It was a man's job. The man was Simon Peter and the job was fishing.

The story begins with Jesus asking Simon for the use of his boat. There were crowds of people all around the shore and Jesus needed to get a little distance between himself and his audience. Simon was only too glad to oblige and he put out a short distance from the shore. He may even have felt a little patronising towards Jesus.

We don't know how long Jesus spoke for but eventually he finished. He turned to Simon and said, 'Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.'

Now Jesus was an expert preacher and no mean healer but Simon was the expert when it came to fishing. That was his trade. Jesus had been a carpenter. What did he know about fishing? What would Simon do?

Verse 5: 'Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.'" The first thing Simon did was to establish that he was the expert and that he knew what he was talking about. 'We've worked hard all night and haven't caught a thing.' But there was something about Jesus that compelled him to do what he asked. 'Because you say so, I will let down the nets.'

What happened next is amazing. Verses 6 and 7: 'When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signalled 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.'

Jesus encountered Peter in the area of his daily work, the area where he was the expert, but Jesus demonstrated a superior level of expertise.

There may be lots of things about work that we don't like but one of the good things about work is that after a while we get to know what we're doing. We feel confident in our ability and experience. Because of that it's possible to exclude Jesus from our daily life there, not deliberately but almost accidentally. One of the lessons of this chapter is that Jesus is interested in what we do and where we work and that he is the real expert. He actually knows more than we do.

We can pray about our work. When things go wrong we can bring it to Jesus. He's there for us in the workplace, Jesus, the expert.

The second story is in verses 12 to 16. The experts this time are the priests. Verse 12: 'While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy.' Literally, he was 'full of leprosy'. He had a desperately chronic skin disease which made him a complete social outcast. It was a long time since he had had to visit the priest and be diagnosed as a leper. From that point on he was obliged to shout out 'Unclean! Unclean!' whenever anyone came near him. But his condition was so severe that no one was likely to come anywhere near. He was a pitiful sight – full of leprosy.

The priest was an expert in this type of skin disease. He was qualified to confirm it and he was also qualified to pronounce a leper clean if in some way he was able to get rid of the disease. When leprosy is mentioned in the Bible it can refer to various skin complaints, some less severe than others.

Jesus recognised the priest's area of expertise. That is why when the leper was cleansed he said in verse 14, 'Don't tell anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them' (that is, as a testimony to the priests).

The priest was an expert in the area of leprosy. He could pronounce a man clean or unclean. But what he could not do was to *make* a man clean when he was unclean. Only Jesus could do that, Jesus the expert.

Notice two more things in verse 13, Jesus' compassion and his power. First, his compassion. 'When [the man] 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!"'

Jesus reached out his hand and touched him. The priest would never have done that. Indeed the law forbade him to do it. No other sensible human being would have taken that risk or even got anywhere near the man. He was bereft of human comfort and normal expressions of love. But Jesus reached out his hand and touched him. What compassion.

That deep compassion is there for us today. However low we may feel, whatever dirty tricks life may have played on us, however isolated and despised we may be, Jesus loves us and reaches out his hand to touch us. What compassion.

And what power. "'I am willing," [Jesus] said. "Be clean!" And immediately the leprosy left him.' Jesus could heal with a touch or with a word and it seems that here it was the word which had the healing power.

In our world there are plenty of pundits who can tell us what's wrong with our lives. They can analyse, diagnose, and identify our woes, but who in the world has the power to cleanse and heal? Only Jesus. Jesus the expert.

The third story in verses 17 to 26 where the experts are the Pharisees and teachers of the Law. The priests were concerned with the ritual aspect of the law but the Pharisees and teachers of the law were more concerned with its moral aspects, the way it impacted everyday life. They were the expert theologians of their day.

Both Matthew and Mark record this miracle of Jesus but Luke mentions something right at the start which was of particular interest to him. Verse 17: 'One day as he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law, who had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem, were sitting there. And the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick.'

This was like a massive theological convention, 'from *every* village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem'. They weren't there for a holiday. They had their theological pencils sharpened and all their theological wits about them. They had heard about Jesus and they didn't like what they heard, breaking the Sabbath, blaspheming. If it was true they were going to get him.

True to form, Jesus walked right into their trap. It was quite dramatic really. A paralysed man was lowered down from the roof by four of his friends. Verse 20 says, 'When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."' That was it.

Verse 21: 'The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, "Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"'

And, you know what? They were absolutely right. They knew their stuff. They really were the experts.

Verse 22 goes on, 'Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, "Why are you thinking these things in your hearts?' I've heard preachers use this as an evidence for the deity of Christ. He knew what they were thinking. That may be true but I suspect

this was no supernatural insight. I suspect everyone in that room knew what they were thinking. Why else had they come from all corners of the country? It was to find out the truth about Jesus, what he was teaching, what he was claiming. This was their worst fear and what they were thinking must have been written all over their faces.

Now Jesus turned from the paralytic to the Pharisees and legal experts. 'Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? Which is easier: to say, "Your sins are forgiven," or to say, "Get up and walk"?''

It was a brilliant question. You didn't need a PhD to know the answer. The easier thing to say was, 'Your sins are forgiven'. There was no way of checking that objectively. So Jesus said, in effect, 'OK, then, I'll do the more difficult thing.' Verse 24: "'But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins ...'" He said to the paralyzed man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home."

Verses 25 and 26: 'Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, "We have seen remarkable things today."'

The experts were not wrong in their theology. They knew from the Old Testament that only God could forgive sins. They could pronounce in God's name that a sin was forgiven but no mere man could give forgiveness in his own name. Indeed the issue of forgiveness could not be finally settled until the last day, the day of resurrection, the day of judgment.

Jesus did not question that expert knowledge but by his actions he proved that he was more than man. He was the God-man. He forgave sins in his own name. Not only so, but in his own death and resurrection he made forgiveness a present reality, taking away from those who trust in him all doubt and fear of future punishment.

In the area of forgiveness and eternal life Jesus showed a greater, a higher level of expertise. The Pharisees knew that forgiveness was possible. Jesus made it actual.

The greatest problem was not lack of success in fishing, not even leprosy or paralysis, not ceremonial uncleanness or theological preciseness. 'Your sins are forgiven.' That was the greatest need, their greatest need, and ours too.

We need to know Jesus in our every day working lives. We need his cleansing from sin. We need his knowledge and his guidance in living our lives in the right way. But our greatest need is for forgiveness and deliverance from sin.