

Homiletics Analysis: Luke 5

Content & Intent

This Text — Content

Luke 5 presents four interlocking episodes that together construct a single sustained argument about who Jesus is and what His arrival inaugurates. The chapter opens at the Sea of Galilee, where Jesus borrows Simon Peter's boat to teach the crowds, then commands a miraculous catch of fish that breaks nets and overwhelms boats, culminating in Peter's collapse at Jesus' feet and a call to discipleship (vv. 1–11). The second episode records the healing of a leprous man who approaches Jesus in bold faith; Jesus touches him — an act of deliberate, defiling contact by the law's logic — and heals him instantly, then instructs him to complete the Mosaic cleansing rite (vv. 12–16). The third episode escalates: Jesus is teaching in a crowded house when four men lower a paralyzed friend through the roof; Jesus announces forgiveness of sins before healing the man's body, triggering the first open conflict with scribes and Pharisees who charge blasphemy (vv. 17–26). The chapter closes with the call of Levi the tax collector and the banquet that follows, where Jesus defends His association with sinners by declaring He has come as a physician to the sick, and then answers the question about fasting with two parables — new wine cannot go into old wineskins; unshrunk cloth cannot patch old garments — announcing that the new order He is inaugurating cannot be contained within the old (vv. 27–39).

The chapter's movement is progressive: each episode raises the stakes of Jesus' identity and authority, and each episode produces a stronger reaction — wonder, awe, confession, controversy, and finally the accusation that Jesus is overturning the established religious order. The chapter ends not with resolution but with the ominous note that those who have drunk old wine do not want the new.

This Text — Intent

God is pressing a specific question on the reader through this chapter: *Will you receive the new thing Jesus is doing, or will you cling to the old?* Each episode forces a decision about Jesus — His authority over nature, over disease, over sin, over social boundaries, and over religious categories. The chapter's intent is not merely to establish Jesus' credentials but to confront the reader with the same fork in the road that splits every character in the chapter: Peter's confession and abandonment of nets versus the Pharisees' hardening; Levi's immediate rising and following versus the grumbling at his banquet. Luke is building a case that Jesus is not a reformer within the existing system but the inaugurator of something entirely new — and that the failure to receive Him is not intellectual but volitional, rooted in love for the old wine.

Subject Sentence: Jesus the new thing — authority that breaks old categories and demands decision.

Primary Claim: Jesus has arrived with an authority so complete — over nature, disease, sin, and religious boundary — that He cannot be accommodated within the existing order; He demands not adjustment but abandonment and following.

Interpretive Evaluation

The Forgiveness of Sins in vv. 17–26

The central interpretive flashpoint in Luke 5 is the healing of the paralytic and Jesus' declaration, "Your sins are forgiven you" (v. 20). The scribes and Pharisees identify the theological issue with precision: "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (v. 21). The question is whether Jesus' response — healing the man to demonstrate authority over sin — constitutes a genuine claim to divine identity or a more modest claim to mediated authority.

A Wesleyan/Arminian reading often emphasizes the human response of faith here (the friends' faith, the paralytic's condition) as the activating mechanism of both forgiveness and healing. There is a genuine insight here — Luke explicitly notes that Jesus "saw their faith" (v. 20) — and application should not ignore the role of persistent, intercessory faith displayed by the four friends. However, this reading, if pressed, can make faith the operative agent rather than Jesus, and misses the passage's controlling argument: it is not faith that is on trial before the Pharisees but *Jesus' authority*. The healing is not a reward for faith; it is a proof of Christological claim.

The Dispensational instinct to flatten the miracle as primarily an authentication of the Messianic kingdom offer to Israel may be *acknowledged* as partially true — Luke is building a Christological case — but it does not capture the personal, relational texture of these encounters or their present applicability to the reader. Jesus is not merely displaying credentials; He is saving, touching, calling, and eating with people.

The Lutheran Law/Gospel reading of this passage is illuminating: Jesus enacts the very thing the law could not accomplish — forgiveness of sins and physical wholeness — and does so not through priestly ritual or legal compliance (the Pharisees' expectation) but through His own sovereign word. This maps well onto the Reformed reading and may be *acknowledged* as reinforcing it.

The Reformed reading holds: Jesus is claiming and demonstrating divine authority over every domain — creation, disease, sin, social boundary — and the chapter's structure is designed to press this claim with mounting force until the old-wineskin people are forced to either receive Him or reject Him. The phrase "Son of Man has authority on earth to

forgive sins” (v. 24) is not a concession to mediated authority — it is a direct claim that the divine prerogative to forgive has arrived in human form, operating *on earth*, presently. This is best read in light of Daniel 7:13–14, where the Son of Man receives all authority — a background Luke’s readers would have registered.

The New Wine / Old Wineskins Parable (vv. 36–39)

A recurring misreading treats this parable primarily as a principle of institutional flexibility — a mandate for churches to modernize programs, abandon tradition, or embrace change. This misreading is generated by abstracting the parable from its narrative context. In Luke 5, the parable is Jesus’ answer to a question about fasting — specifically, why His disciples do not fast as John’s disciples and the Pharisees’ disciples fast. The “old wineskins” are not stale programs or resistant personalities in general; they are the old-covenant structures of religious life (fasting, piety practices, boundary markers) that cannot accommodate the presence of the Bridegroom Himself. The parable must be *refuted* in its decontextualized application and *restored* to its Christological and covenantal frame: Jesus is announcing the arrival of something so new that the old container will burst trying to hold it.

The final verse (v. 39) — “no one after drinking old wine desires new, for he says, ‘The old is good’” — is sometimes read as a concession to traditionalists or as an endorsement of old wine’s quality. It should be read as a sober diagnostic: this is the spiritual condition of those who resist Jesus, not an excuse for it. It is a warning, not a rationale.

Key Canonical Support

- **Daniel 7:13–14** — The “Son of Man” language in v. 24 reaches back to Daniel’s vision of one like a son of man receiving dominion, glory, and a kingdom from the Ancient of Days; Jesus’ claim to authority on earth to forgive sins carries this full weight — He is not merely a healer but the figure in whom all authority is vested.
- **Isaiah 61:1–2** — The programmatic statement of Luke 4:18–19 (Jesus’ Nazareth sermon, the immediately preceding chapter) grounds Luke 5’s episodes: the good news to the poor, release to captives, recovery of sight to the blind is now being enacted — the leper cleansed, the paralytic healed, the sinners called.
- **Hosea 6:6 / Matthew 9:13** — “I desire mercy, not sacrifice” — the Levitical call and the banquet with sinners directly instantiate this principle; Jesus is not abolishing the law but fulfilling its heart, which the Pharisees’ application had lost.
- **Romans 4:5–8** — “God justifies the ungodly” — Paul’s exposition of justification by faith echoes the paralytic’s episode: the one who cannot move, who brings nothing, who receives forgiveness as a word spoken over him; the theological architecture of Romans 4 illuminates what is happening in Luke 5:17–26.

- **2 Corinthians 5:17** — “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, the new has come” — the new-wineskin announcement of Luke 5:36–39 finds its full canonical development here; the new thing Jesus inaugurates is nothing less than new creation, which cannot be patched onto the old.

Aim: To press the reader to identify with the characters in Luke 5 and answer the chapter’s driving question — *will you receive the new thing Jesus is, or cling to the old?* — so that they emerge not with more information about Jesus but with a decision before them.

Content Table

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
5:1–3	Jesus teaches from Simon’s boat on the Lake of Gennesaret; crowds press to hear the word of God	The word of God is the governing category — miracles follow teaching, not the reverse
5:4–7	Jesus commands a deep-water net let-down after a fruitless night; the catch overwhelms two boats	The miraculous catch follows explicit obedience to an improbable command
5:8–10a	Peter falls at Jesus’ knees: “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord”; James and John also astonished	First use of “Lord” (kyrios) by Peter; first self-identification as a “sinful man” — holiness of Jesus disclosed
5:10b–11	Jesus calls Peter: “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men”; all leave everything and follow	“Left everything” — the costliness of following is underlined from the first call
5:12–13	A man full of leprosy falls before Jesus: “If you will, you can make me clean”; Jesus touches him and heals him	“If you will” — faith in Jesus’ power but submission to His sovereign will; Jesus touches the untouchable
5:14–16	Jesus instructs silence and directs the man to the priest for Mosaic cleansing; Jesus withdraws to pray	Jesus fulfills, not abolishes, Mosaic ritual while His fame spreads; withdrawal to pray signals dependence on the Father
5:17	Pharisees and teachers of the law from every village of Galilee and Judea, and	The official observers arrive — the audience shifts; the

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
5:18–19	Jerusalem, are sitting there Four men bring a paralyzed man on a mat; unable to enter through the crowd, they lower him through the roof	stakes escalate Persistent, creative, intercessory faith — they will not be stopped
5:20	Jesus sees their faith and says: “Man, your sins are forgiven you”	Forgiveness precedes healing; sin is the deeper problem; faith is the occasion, not the cause
5:21	Scribes and Pharisees question: “Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?”	They are theologically correct in their premise — the issue is whether they will apply it honestly
5:22–24	Jesus perceives their thoughts; asks which is easier; heals the man to demonstrate the Son of Man’s authority to forgive sins on earth	“Son of Man” — Danielic claim; authority “on earth” — the divine prerogative operating in the present, in the flesh
5:25–26	The man rises, takes his mat, glorifies God, and goes home; all are amazed and glorify God: “We have seen extraordinary things today”	The crowd’s response is wonder and God-glorifying awe — not yet the hardened rejection that follows
5:27–28	Jesus sees Levi at the tax booth; says “Follow me”; Levi rises and follows, leaving everything	Parallel to vv. 10b–11: “leaving everything” repeated — the pattern of total response to the call
5:29–30	Levi gives a great feast; large crowd of tax collectors and others recline with Jesus; Pharisees and scribes grumble: “Why do you eat with tax collectors and sinners?”	The banquet as enacted theology — Jesus’ table fellowship announces acceptance; the Pharisees’ grumbling reveals their category system
5:31–32	Jesus: “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the	The physician metaphor defines the mission; “righteous” is ironic — those who think themselves

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
5:33	righteous but sinners to repentance” Question about fasting: John’s disciples fast often, as do the Pharisees’; why do Jesus’ disciples eat and drink?	righteous have disqualified themselves from the call The question reveals incomprehension of what Jesus’ presence means
5:34–35	Jesus: the wedding guests cannot fast while the Bridegroom is present; days are coming when the Bridegroom will be taken, and then they will fast	Bridegroom imagery — Jesus identifies Himself with the messianic Bridegroom; fasting is eschatologically conditioned, not abolished
5:36–38	Parables of the new patch and new wineskins: incompatibility of the new with the old; new wine requires new wineskins	The parables interpret the whole chapter: Jesus is not a refinement of the existing system but its replacement
5:39	“No one after drinking old wine desires new, for he says, ‘The old is good’”	A sober diagnosis of the Pharisees’ condition — the love of the old is the obstacle to receiving the new

Divisions Table

Division	Verses	Label
1	5:1–11	The Miraculous Catch and the Call of Simon: Authority Over Creation and the First Following
2	5:12–16	The Cleansing of the Leper: Authority Over Defilement and the Touched Untouchable
3	5:17–26	The Healing of the Paralytic: Authority Over Sin and the First Controversy
4	5:27–32	The Call of Levi and the Banquet with Sinners:

Division	Verses	Label
5	5:33–39	Authority Over Social Boundary and the Physician’s Mission The Question of Fasting and the New Wineskins: The Incompatibility of the New Order with the Old

Subject Sentence & Primary Claim (*restated*)

Subject Sentence: Jesus the new thing — authority that breaks old categories and demands decision.

Primary Claim: Jesus has arrived with an authority so complete — over nature, disease, sin, and religious boundary — that He cannot be accommodated within the existing order; He demands not adjustment but abandonment and following.

Applications (Five)

1. Receive Jesus’ authority over sin as the deeper healing you actually need. (*Mind/Belief*)

The paralytic was lowered through the roof for physical healing, and Jesus gave him something more fundamental first: forgiveness. Most people who come to Jesus come with their presenting problem — a broken relationship, an anxious mind, a failing body, a stuck life. Luke 5 is insisting that beneath every presenting problem is the same root condition: sin and its alienation from God. The application is not passive — it is a reorientation of what we think we most need. Stop treating Jesus as a resource for your actual agenda and receive Him as the physician who knows the real diagnosis. The forgiveness He pronounces is not a detour to what you came for; it *is* what you came for, whether you knew it or not.

2. Respond to Jesus’ call with the totality that Peter and Levi modeled — not negotiation but abandonment. (*Will/Behavior*)

Luke 5 records two explicit calls to discipleship (Peter in v. 11; Levi in v. 28), and both are described with the same phrase: they “left everything.” This is not coincidental — Luke is establishing the pattern of genuine response to Jesus. The application is concrete: identify what you have not left. Not every believer sells every possession, but every believer has an equivalent of the nets, the boat, the tax booth — the thing their identity, security, or livelihood is built on that a genuine response to Jesus would require relinquishing. The

question is not whether you attend services or affirm the doctrines, but whether there is something you would not leave for Him. Name it. Then deal with it.

3. Let the holiness of Jesus produce honest self-knowledge rather than defensive self-justification. (*Affections/Worship*)

Peter's response to the miraculous catch was not enthusiasm or gratitude — it was prostration and confession: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Proximity to Jesus' holiness produced self-knowledge that Peter could not have generated through introspection alone. The Pharisees, by contrast, stood at a distance from Jesus (they are "sitting there" in v. 17, observing) and their distance preserved their self-assessment. The application is to bring yourself into genuine proximity to Jesus in Scripture and prayer not as a devotional routine but as an act that invites the same effect Peter experienced — the collapse of self-justification and the honest naming of what you are before Him. This is not self-flagellation; Peter was not sent away but commissioned. The confession is the door to the call.

4. Examine whether you are functionally an old-wineskin person — clinging to religious familiarity over living encounter with Jesus. (*Mind/Belief*)

The old-wineskin condition in Luke 5 is not irreligiosity — it is religiosity. The Pharisees fasted, studied Scripture, tithed, prayed, and kept boundaries. Their problem was not that they were pagans but that their religious system had become an end in itself, and Jesus — the thing the entire system was pointing toward — did not fit their categories. The diagnostic question is not "am I religious enough?" but "is my religious life serving as a container for Jesus or a substitute for Him?" Old-wineskin people are not cold to religion; they are warm to it in ways that leave no room for the disruptive, boundary-crossing, sinner-eating Jesus of Luke 5. Examine the places where your religious expectations and habits have become non-negotiables, and ask whether Jesus would fit in them or burst them.

5. Worship Jesus as the one who touches the untouchable and pursues the excluded — and let that worship reshape how you regard people outside the acceptable categories. (*Affections/Worship*)

Jesus touched the leper (v. 13) — a deliberate act that violated purity conventions and communicated something the law could not communicate: that in His presence, the direction of contagion reverses. He does not become unclean; the leper becomes clean. He ate with tax collectors and sinners (v. 30) at a table that His contemporaries read as an announcement of acceptance. The worshipful response to this is not merely gratitude for one's own inclusion; it is a reshaping of how the worshipper regards people outside acceptable social and religious categories. Who are the people in your world that would read your life as evidence that God pursues them? This is not a program suggestion — it is a question about whether the Jesus who ate with Levi is actually the Jesus you worship, or whether you worship a tidier version.

Theological Importance

Theological Importance: Luke 5 is a concentrated disclosure of the doctrine of the person and work of Christ operating simultaneously. Every episode adds a dimension to the reader's understanding of who Jesus is: the creator who commands creation (the fish), the holy one whose nearness produces conviction (Peter's confession), the one who overturns the logic of defilement by touching the leper and transmitting cleanness rather than receiving uncleanness, the Son of Man with divine authority to forgive sins, the physician who has come on a rescue mission for the sick, the Bridegroom whose presence is the eschatological event that reorders everything including religious practice. The chapter also teaches that Jesus' work addresses the whole person — body, sin, social exclusion, and religious alienation — and that His authority is not limited to any single domain. Critically, the chapter teaches that the arrival of this authority demands a response: it cannot be observed neutrally, and the text is honest that some will prefer the old wine.

Reformed Theological Significance

Reformed Theological Significance: Luke 5 is a narrative exposition of grace operating entirely from divine initiative, and its Reformed significance lies in precisely this: no one in this chapter earns or merits what they receive. The fish come because Jesus commands; the leper is healed because Jesus wills and touches; the paralytic receives forgiveness before he has done anything — he has simply been carried to Jesus by the faith of others; Levi is called while sitting at the tax booth, mid-transaction. The Pharisees' alternative is the works-system that justifies by religious performance, and the chapter's climax (the new-wineskin parable) is a declaration that this system cannot hold the gospel. What Jesus inaugurates is not a refinement of the merit-and-performance structure but its replacement — forgiveness spoken by sovereign word, grace extended to those outside every acceptable category, a call that requires not preparation but abandonment. The physician metaphor (v. 31–32) is profoundly Reformed in its anthropology: Jesus did not come for those who are managing their condition but for those who know they are sick. Self-righteous competence is the one thing that keeps a person from the physician, and the Pharisees' tragedy is that their religiosity had convinced them they were not in the waiting room.

Main Takeaway

Jesus is not a better version of what you already have — He is something so new that your old categories will burst trying to contain Him. He has authority over everything that has broken you: your uncleanness, your paralysis, your sin, your exclusion. The only question Luke 5 leaves open is the one it asks every character and every reader: will you fall at His

feet, leave your nets, and follow — or will you look at the new wine and say you prefer the old?

Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls

- **Preaching the episodes as disconnected miracle stories rather than a cumulative argument.** The most common structural failure with Luke 5 is treating each episode as a self-contained unit with its own moral lesson — “be like the friends who lowered the man through the roof,” “be like Levi and respond immediately,” “don’t be like the Pharisees.” This produces five short sermons rather than one. Luke 5 is architecturally designed: each episode escalates the Christological claim and sharpens the decision that the final episode forces. Preach the chapter as a movement, not an anthology.
- **Making the paralytic episode primarily about intercessory faith and missing the Christological claim.** The four friends’ faith is genuine and admirable, and it is appropriate to note it. But Jesus’ healing of the paralytic exists in the narrative to demonstrate His authority to forgive sins — that is Luke’s explicit statement in v. 24. A sermon that climaxes with “bring your friends to Jesus like these four men did” has preached the frame and missed the picture. The claim being argued is that Jesus has divine authority to pronounce forgiveness, and the healing is the proof. Preach the proof’s conclusion, not the proof’s props.
- **Applying the new-wineskins parable as a change-management principle.** This is perhaps the most widespread misapplication of any verse in this chapter. “We need new wineskins” has become a slogan for institutional flexibility, ministry innovation, and the abandonment of tradition. The parable is doing something entirely different: it is explaining why the Pharisees cannot receive Jesus — their old-covenant piety structures have become self-referential, and the presence of the Bridegroom-Messiah ruptures them. The application is Christological and soteriological, not organizational. Guard this parable from its institutional hijacking and restore its force: the new thing is *Jesus*, and the old wineskin is any religious system, habit, or self-understanding that has become an alternative to Him.
- **Missing the irony of v. 32 and softening its diagnostic edge.** “I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance” is sometimes preached as pure invitation without its accompanying irony: the “righteous” are the ones who think they are righteous — the Pharisees, the self-sufficient, the religious. Jesus is not saying the genuinely righteous don’t need Him (no one is genuinely righteous in that sense). He is saying that those who have convinced themselves they are well will never enter the physician’s office. This verse has a hard edge that should not be blunted: the greatest obstacle to receiving Jesus is not gross sin but the functional self-righteousness of people who are doing well by their own standard.

- **Treating Peter's call as primarily a vocational commissioning and missing its confessional core.** Peter is called after he falls in confession — “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man.” The call to fish for men does not bypass this confession; it comes *through* it. The temptation is to preach the call as a challenge to join the mission while omitting the self-knowledge that precedes it. A disciple who has not experienced something analogous to Peter's collapse is not ready for the commission. The order matters: conviction, then calling. Do not abbreviate the sequence.
- **Failing to connect Luke 5 to Luke 4 and the programmatic Nazareth sermon.** Luke 5 is the enactment of Luke 4:18–21 — Jesus declared in the synagogue that He had come to proclaim good news to the poor, recovery of sight to the blind, release to captives. Luke 5 then shows what this looks like: lepers cleansed, paralytics healed, sinners called. Without this connection, Luke 5 reads as a remarkable series of episodes; with it, it reads as the fulfillment of a Messianic program already announced. A sermon or study on Luke 5 that does not briefly anchor it in the Isaiah 61 declaration of Luke 4 is missing the chapter's own framing.