

# **SOUTH ASIA BIBLE COMMENTARY**

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were stunned; when a woman was healed, her response was to get up and serve him with gratitude. Finally, the people flocked to him for healing (4:40). When the gospel was first preached in Nagaland, people had a similar response to it. They welcomed it because it offered release from fear of evil spirits, healing from diseases and blessings from the Creator of the universe.

While the people recognised Jesus as a healer, the demons recognised him as the *Son of God* and *Messiah* (4:41; see also 4:3, 9). But he would not allow them to declare this, for he knew that the devil would like to mislead the people into interpreting his role as Messiah in political terms. Jesus knew that he was called to suffering and death in order to save his people from sin, not from Rome (9:21-22).

The people of Capernaum wanted Jesus to stay with them because of what he had done for them (4:42). But Jesus knew that he needed to move on to bring blessing to others by proclaiming *the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also* (4:43-44). This proclamation involved more than just preaching, it also involved healing the sick and releasing those held prisoner by Satan (exorcism). Jesus was fulfilling his calling to proclaim the good news to the poor (4:18).

When the preaching of the gospel is accompanied by works of power, its truth is validated. Those who hear the word will more readily accept it and exclaim that Jesus is the Lord, the Holy One of God, just as was said in Capernaum.

### 5:1-11 The Call of Simon Peter

Mark's account of the call of Peter and his brother gives the impression that Jesus' call and their response took only a matter of minutes (Mark 1:16-20). Luke's longer account suggests that there was a time of preparation before Peter was called and chose to follow Jesus. Before issuing the call, Jesus visited Simon Peter's home, where he healed Peter's mother-in-law, who was sick with a high fever (4:38-39). That, and the other healings at that time, must have shown Peter that Jesus had great power to heal and to exorcise (4:38-39). So the call to Peter was not a call to follow someone he did not know.

It was this friendship between them that made it easy for Jesus to make use of Peter's boat in Luke 5. Jesus was teaching by the Lake of Gennesaret (also known as the Sea of Galilee) and attracting large crowds (5:1). He needed some slightly raised position if he was to address them effectively, and so when he saw two boats at the water's edge, he stepped into Simon's boat. Pushing off a little from the shore, he was able to continue his teaching from the boat without being jostled by the crowd (5:2-3).

At the end of the sermon, Jesus wanted to teach Simon an important lesson. So he told him to *put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch* (5:4).

Simon, an experienced fisherman, knew that there was very little chance of a catch, but because of his earlier experience of Jesus' mighty acts he called him *Master* and respectfully said, *I will let down the nets* (5:5). The result was amazing! The nets were so full of fish that they *began to break* and the boats were almost swamped (5:6-7).

Peter and all his companions were *astonished* by what had happened. At a loss for words, Simon Peter fell at Jesus' knees and said, *Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!* (5:8). In the presence of the divine, Peter felt afraid and unworthy (5:9). But Jesus told him not to be afraid (see 1:13, 30) and gave him the assurance that in future he would *fish for people* (5:10b).

Though Luke focuses on Peter, James and John were also present and shared in this commissioning. They too responded to Jesus, left everything behind and followed him (5:10a, 11). Luke is reminding us of the importance of holding lightly to possessions.

Responding to the call of Christ in Asia today requires that we too become "fishers" for people (Matt 28:16-20). We must go out into our world to find men and women who are broken and then respond to their needs. There are some whose bodies have been broken by poverty, sickness, domestic violence or a lack of the basic necessities of life. Others have broken hearts, emotionally and spiritually. They are all in need of love and life. It is to such people that Jesus is calling us to go. He is asking us to "catch" them by capturing their hearts for Christ so that they too may enjoy the abundant life he gives.

### 5:12-16 Healing of a Man with Leprosy

Luke tells another story about a person with leprosy who came to Jesus with great faith, fell down before him and begged to be cleansed (5:12). Before we can appreciate what Jesus did for this man, we need to understand what it meant to have leprosy at that time.

In Jesus' day leprosy was an incurable disease that many Jews believed was a punishment for sin. People with leprosy were regarded as ceremonially unclean and were ostracised. They were not allowed to live in the cities or the villages. Whenever they came near any human habitation they had to shout, "Unclean! Unclean!" (Lev 13:1-3, 45-46). Separated from home, family and friends, people with leprosy must have endured terrible loneliness, even though they sometimes lived together with others with leprosy. They lived without hope.

The social isolation of people with leprosy was somewhat similar to the situation of those regarded as "unclean" in South Asia, where many assume that even the shadow of someone from an outcaste pollutes anyone it falls on.

But Jesus did not curse the person with leprosy, or pull back from him. He knew that purity concerns are less important than meeting human needs. So he reached out

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