Luke 5-6 - The fundamental principles of Jesus’ ministry

*5:1-11 – The call of the first disciples*

Jesus performs a miracle to persuade Simon (and James & John) to join Him in his mission as stated in 4:43 (but he said to them, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose."). The call begins with Simon Peter’s acknowledgment of his sinfulness and proceeds through reassurance (“do not fear”) to call and finally acceptance (“They left everything and followed him.”) Following Jesus involves acknowledgement of one’s sinful unworthiness and abandonment of all earthly attachments.

*5:12-16 – Healing the leper*

Jesus’ healing power is unlimited, but we cannot presume upon him (“If you are willing, you can make me clean.”) This is in keeping with Jesus’ reply to His third temptation, “you shall not put the Lord your God to the test (3:12).

*5:17 – 26 – the Healing and forgiveness of the lame man*

The faith of the man’s four friends is demonstrated in their bold action; not in passive waiting.

Healings are indicators of something greater. In 4:18 Jesus quotes from Isaiah as the inauguration of his mission:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives  
and recovering of sight to the blind,  
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

Here Luke makes it clear that His call to bring “liberty to the captives” and “sight to the blind” is more than physical miracles, but indicative of a deeper and harder miracle: forgiveness of sins. The conflict with the Pharisees and scribes begins with a dispute over Jesus’ proclamation of release from the captivity of sin.

*5:17 – 35 – the Call of Levi (aka Matthew)*

Like Peter, James, and John, Levi leaves everything (material and probably also social) to follow Jesus. Again the Pharisees and scribes are offended. This time because Jesus is celebrating with his new-found followers from among the most sinful of all society. There are 2 offenses: the association with sinful people and failure to fast. John the Baptist made it clear that repentance and “deeds worthy of repentance” were the requirements for entry acceptance in God’s kingdom. But here, the sinners demonstrate their repentance by partying instead of fasting, which Jesus tell us is appropriate in His presence. Jesus’ answer that He has come to call sinners, not the righteous, to repentance is consistent with Luke’s persistent emphasis on Jesus’ coming for the outcasts, poor, and oppressed of society. It also is an implicit rejection of the (false and hypocritical) righteousness of the Pharisees.

*5:36-39 – Something new*

The old cloth and old wineskins are emblems of the limited nation of Israel and her relationship with God. Jesus is bringing something new that fulfills the old but does not fit the old without breaking everything open into something new and better.

*6:1-11 – more conflict over the Sabbath*

Harvesting and threshing grain is forbidden on the Sabbath. Jesus defends it, not because it’s too trivial to be considered “work,” but because He is Lord of the Sabbath. Healing on the Sabbath is defended as “doing good.” These are examples of the new wine tearing open the old wineskins. Previously the response to Jesus’ miracles was amazement and giving glory to God. Now the Pharisees and scribes respond with fury and plotting against him.

*6:12-16 – the call of the 12 apostles*

Jesus prays all night prior to making this very important step in His mission. Luke mentioned the Holy Spirit as the driver of all the important events of chapters 1-4. The Holy Spirit is mentioned less often in successive chapters, but Jesus’ dependence on God in prayer indicates that He is still acting in full dependence on the Spirit. Until now, people have only been called to follow him. Now he has selected 12 of his many followers/disciples to be His apostles.

*6:17-49 – the sermon on the plain*

The Sermon is preceded by the reminder that Jesus is continuing his mission of teaching, healing and casting out unclean spirits from the “great crowd of disciples and … multitude of people” who came to Him.

* Beatitudes and woes (20-26)  
  Jesus proclaims the blessings of the Kingdom are for the poor, hungry, sorrowful, and rejected, while the woes of the Kingdom are for the rich, full, happy, and “in crowd.” Later He will explain how the rich are not unconditionally rejected from membership in the kingdom. We can assume that the poor are not unconditionally accepted. This is the most explicit statement of the social reversal that comes with the kingdom of God in Luke. Worldly status and success are antithetical to kingdom status and success.
* Love your enemies (27-36)  
  Kingdom ethics requires us to love our enemies in very concrete and sacrificial ways. John the Baptist has already told us that we have to share our clothing and food with others. Jesus extends that to the obligation to do the same to our enemies with no expectation of return. It is our love and mercy to our enemies that marks us as the children of the Most High God.
* Do not judge (37-42)  
  Love and mercy lead to forgiveness and giving, which God will repay many times over. We are to focus on our own sins (which we cannot easily see) instead of anyone else’s much more visible (to us) sins.
* Warning against hypocrisy (43-49)  
  Our external behaviors will expose what is in our hearts, just as the fruit exposes the kind of tree that produces it. A loving and merciful heart will product acts of love and mercy. Failure to do so requires us to either admit the darkness of our hearts or to be hypocrites. Hypocrisy will lead to utter ruin, while doing what Jesus says will give us a good foundation for our lives.