

That Ye May Know

Luke 5:17-26

This is a very instructive passage for us about the miracle ministry of Jesus. In this text we see Jesus perform a miracle and heal a paralyzed man. And Jesus specifically told those who were present why he performed this miracle. In the first part of v. 24 Jesus says, “But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins.”

This miracle demonstrated through a visible sign that Jesus had the power to forgive sins. And it reminds us that Jesus came to earth for this purpose, to forgive sins. Though he did many great and wonderful works, the primary work of Christ was fulfilled at the cross, paying the debt for our sins. Jesus came to forgive sins and has the power to forgive sins.

I. The Setting for this Miracle

Luke’s gospel doesn’t tell us where this miracle took place, but we know from the other gospel accounts that it was in Capernaum, and very likely in Peter’s house. In verse 17 we are told that the while Jesus was teaching the Pharisees and teachers of the law had come “out of every town of Galilee, and Judæa, and Jerusalem.”

Their presence was a testimony to the growing influence of Jesus and his ministry. They had come to hear Jesus in person and to see the miracles he performed. They probably felt a need to come to some sort of settled opinion about Jesus. We know from what Nicodemus said in John 3 that the ministry of Jesus was a topic of debate among the religious leaders.

And this verse tells us they were “sitting by.” They did not sit at the feet of Jesus to learn from him. They sat by as spectators or even critics, to observe and pass judgment on the ministry of Jesus. And that’s evident from what we see later on in this text.

How often are we like these religious leaders? We come to church services and “sit by” as spectators and critics. We either applaud or frown upon what goes on around us. This should not be. We do not gather at the church, but as the church. If you are a believer, you are part of the body of Christ. We should desire both to receive ministry to and to minister while we are together. If you are a Christian, you have been gifted by the Holy Spirit to minister in the body and God expects you to use your gifts and abilities to serve in the church body (Romans 12). Don’t sit by as idle spectators and critics, but join in as fellow-laborers in the gospel of Christ.

The end of verse 17 says, “The power of the Lord was present to heal them.” Them doesn’t refer to these religious leaders, but the multitudes mentioned in v.

15, many of whom came to Jesus for physical healing. The power of the Lord was present in the person of Jesus Christ. Multitudes of these people were healed.

In v. 18 we are introduced to one of the main characters in this text: the man “taken with a palsy.” This man was paralyzed. Based on how this word is used in the Greek language, it could be paralysis from a stroke.¹ Or it could be any number of diseases which affect the muscles. This was a serious case. This man was bed-ridden. He could not come to Jesus on his own power. Others had to carry him.

Imagine the position of this man. Why had he come, or been brought, to Jesus? Because he was paralyzed. He came to be healed.

This man lived in a time that was dominated by physical ability. What work could he do? How could he provide for himself? What sort of life could he hope to have with this physical condition?

We are told nothing else about this man. We don’t know how old he was. We don’t know if he had a family. We don’t know how long he had been paralyzed. We don’t know how he heard about Jesus. But certainly he came hoping to be healed. And we do know that he had friends.

Look again at the first part of v. 18, “Men brought in a bed a man.” Maybe these men, these friends, told the paralyzed man about Jesus. Maybe they came to him and told him, “We have found a man who can help you!” With great hope and

¹ Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words

determination they carried this man to Jesus and the end of verse 18 tells us that they desired to lay him before Jesus.

Now look at the beginning of v. 19, “They could not find by what way they might bring him in because of the multitude.” Jesus was teaching inside a house and the crowd was so great that the men who were carrying this paralyzed man could not get inside.

Put yourself in the place of this paralyzed man. You are paralyzed and there is no hope that you will naturally recover. But you hear about a teacher, Jesus, who works miracles of healing. You want to go, but who will carry you? Your friends come and carry you to Jesus in your bed. But as you come near to where Jesus is teaching, that glimmer of hope begins to fade. There is a huge crowd around the house where Jesus is teaching. It’s obvious that the crowd will keep you from seeing Jesus.

But these men didn’t give up. If they could not get their paralyzed friend through the door, they would make another way. Look at the second part of verse 19, “They went upon the housetop, and let him down through the tiling with his couch into the midst before Jesus.”

Imagine this scene as it played out. Jesus is sitting in a room, teaching, and suddenly some dust begins to fall from the ceiling as the roof tiles are peeled back. The crowd that was gathered to listen to Jesus is suddenly distracted as sunlight begins to stream through this hole in the roof that gets bigger and bigger. The

religious leaders who were there look on in shock as a bed is lowered through this new hole in the roof. And on that bed is this paralyzed man. He can't move. He is at the mercy of his friends. And they will seemingly stop at nothing to get this paralyzed man before Jesus.

What an interesting and strange setting Luke describes here. But no matter how surprising the circumstances of verses 17, 18 and 19, what happened in v. 20 is even more surprising. Look at what Jesus said to the paralyzed man.

II. What Jesus Said to the Paralyzed Man

Here is this paralyzed man laying before Jesus, and Jesus takes notice of him. How could Jesus do anything but notice this man? He has just been lowered in through the ceiling.

The first part of verse 20 tells us, "And when Jesus saw their faith." As this scene unfolded before him, what Jesus noticed was their faith. The faith of the friends and the faith of the paralyzed man.

And Jesus addressed him, "Man." In the gospels of Matthew and Mark it is recorded that Jesus called him, "Son." What a rollercoaster of emotions this paralyzed man must have experienced. First, hope as he was being carried to Jesus. Then maybe disappointment or even despair as he saw the crowds that would keep him from being brought before Jesus. But then hope again as his friends didn't give up, but lowered him through the roof to get him to Jesus. And Jesus did not rebuke

him for the disturbance. Jesus wasn't angry. Jesus saw their faith and he addressed the paralyzed man: "Man. Son."

Imagine you had never heard an account of this miracle before. Pretend that you don't know what happens next. Again, put yourself in the place of the paralyzed man at that moment. Jesus has taken notice of you. He has addressed you with kindness. What is your expectation? What will happen next?

Did Jesus tell him, "Take up your bed and walk?"

Did Jesus say, "I have seen your faith, and your faith has made you whole."

No. Look again at what Jesus said to the man in verse 20, "And when he saw their faith, he said unto him, **Man, thy sins are forgiven thee.**" I've wondered if this man was disappointed. It seems apparent that he came to Jesus to be physically healed. He was paralyzed and he wanted to be made whole. But in love and compassion and with an eye toward his greater need, Jesus told him, "Thy sins are forgiven thee."

Freedom from sin is the greatest human need. Sin is what brings about every sort of suffering in this world. Though Jesus healed many people of physical ailments, he did not come to deliver humanity from suffering on this earth. He came to save his people from their sins (Matthew 1:21). If Jesus had healed this paralyzed man, it would have been incredible. But far more incredible, far more shocking to those present were these words from Jesus, "Thy sins be forgiven thee."

See from this text the incredible power of Jesus to save. What did this man do to be saved? He came to Jesus. But not even that, he was brought to Jesus. Others carried him. And not only that, but he came with a different motive. As far as we know, he only came or was brought in the hope that he would be healed. He was paralyzed and he wanted Jesus to make him whole.

We know nothing about what took place in his heart. We are not told what thoughts were in his mind. The only detail we are given is Jesus looked at him and the men who brought him, and he saw their faith. And Jesus told him, “You are forgiven.”

The paralyzed man said nothing. As far as we know, he knew very little about Jesus. He doesn't confess any great truth about Jesus in this text. But in that moment he had a true saving faith, and Jesus forgave his sins.

What is necessary to be saved? Faith. But not faith abstractly. Not faith in just anything. Lots of people have a lot of faith in things that will bring them to damnation. Your faith must have Jesus Christ as its object. See your need and come to Jesus.

You may be like this paralyzed man. You might not have great depth of theological knowledge. You might not be able to confess great truth about Jesus. You might not even fully understand your spiritual needs. But if you are convicted of your sin and you look to Jesus Christ and him alone for salvation, you will be saved.

Such is the power of Christ to save. He doesn't save us because of who we are, but because of who he is. He saves us in spite of what we are. He doesn't save the righteous, he saves sinners. He is glorified in saving sinners. We contribute the sin and the weakness and the frailty and the need and the ignorance and every other shortcoming and corruption imaginable. And he saves.

The gospel call goes out like the old hymn says: "Come, ye sinners, poor and needy / Weak and wounded, sick and sore / Jesus ready, stands to save you / Full of pity, love and power." Come to Jesus in faith and repentance. Jesus said in John 6:37, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."

Well, that's a beautiful sentiment, but how do we know? How do we know that Jesus has power to forgive sins?

Skepticism is not a modern invention. The Bible is full of skeptics. People who were present when Jesus told this man his sins were forgiven were skeptical of this proclamation. How could anyone possibly know, then or now, that Jesus had the authority to forgive sins? Let's look at the rest of this text and examine the miracle Jesus performed.

III. The Miracle Jesus Performed

Verse 21 tells us how those who were present responded to this declaration from Jesus about the forgiveness of sins. There was murmuring among the

religious leaders. Though they didn't say anything, they immediately thought: "Blasphemy!"

They knew the Scriptures. They knew that only God can forgive sins. They were unwilling to acknowledge that Jesus was the Christ, the anointed one sent from God. And so when Jesus forgave this man's sins these proud and hard-hearted onlookers strongly disapproved.

Look at how Jesus responded to them. The first part of verse 22 says: "When Jesus had perceived their thoughts." This is an example of omniscience. Jesus knew what they were thinking. He "perceived their thoughts." Nothing is hidden from the Lord. Our minds and our hearts lay bare before him. He sees and knows all. He knows us better than we know ourselves. We can deceive ourselves, but we cannot deceive Him.

Verse 22 and 23 continues: "He [Jesus] answering said unto them, What reason ye in your hearts? Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk?"

Which is easier: to forgive this man's sins or heal him on command? The religious leaders were right, no mere man has the power to forgive sins. Such authority belongs to God and God alone. So the first task is impossible. On a scale of difficulty, it is off the scale. It can't be done.

How about healing the man? We live in a time of incredible medical ability. Doctors can do more now than ever before. But we still can't do what Jesus proposed here: heal on command. This second task is also impossible.

They are not equal tasks. Certainly to forgive sins is a greater work than physical healing. The soul is of greater value than the body. That which is spiritual is more excellent than that which is carnal. This is why God's people willingly choose to suffer affliction rather than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. We look and hope for something which is greater than this carnal world.

Again, these two tasks Jesus presented in verse 23 are not equal, but from our perspective they are both impossible. Neither of them can be done by man.

Jesus didn't wait for the religious leaders to answer. In the first part of v. 24 Jesus told them why he was about to do what he did. Jesus said to the religious leaders, "But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins." This was his plan and purpose. This is why Jesus performed this miracle and so many others. To demonstrate his power upon earth to forgive sins.

Then Jesus said paralyzed man, "I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house." These words, by themselves, mean nothing. You and I could go tell any number of sick people to recover and it would do no good. No one would be healed. There is no power, no authority, behind our words.

But what about the words of Jesus? Look at verse 25, “And immediately he rose up before them, and took up that whereon he lay, and departed to his own house, glorifying God.”

What did this man do? He obeyed the impossible command of Christ. He was paralyzed. Jesus told him to arise, pick up his bed, and go home. And this paralyzed man, by grace through faith, obeyed.

He was no longer paralyzed. He was healed. He was *immediately* healed. He was *totally* healed. “The bed had borne the man: now the man bore the bed.”²

What a beautiful illustration this is of salvation. The gospel call goes out. God commands all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30). It is an impossible command. We have no will within ourselves to obey God. We are like this paralyzed man. He was a prisoner in the weakness of his body. We are prisoners in the strength of our sin. He could not physically move himself to Christ. We cannot spiritually move ourselves to Christ.

And yet, all over the world for the last 2000 years, people have been obeying the impossible command of Christ to repent and believe. How can this be? By grace through faith, we can obey. This is the gift of God. The gift of salvation. Where we have no strength to stand, God gives us strength. Where we have no will to obey, God makes a new will within us.

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May we follow the example of this man and heed the call of Christ. In faith obey the command to repent of your sins and turn to Christ. And then may all of us do as this man did.

“He departed . . . glorifying God.” His sins had been forgiven, his body had been healed, and he glorified God. To this end we were created: to glorify God. We glorify God by lifting up his name in the world, and magnifying him in the eyes of others. In view of your great salvation, glorify God. Appreciate him, adore him, show Him all due affection, and obey His commands. This is how we glorify God.

Verse 26 concludes this text: (Read verse). The crowd of people that witnessed this miracle were amazed, they glorified God, and they were afraid. Why? Because by this miracle Jesus demonstrated that He was God incarnate.

Look back again at verse 24. Jesus had just been accused of blasphemy because he claimed to have the power to forgive sins. This is a power that belongs to God alone. In verse 24 Jesus said, “But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins.” This miracle was a visible demonstration of the power and authority of God in the man Jesus Christ. This account has been preserved for us for the same purpose, so that we may know that the Son of man, Jesus Christ, has power upon earth to forgive sins.