

Luke

We Have Seen Strange Things Today
Luke 5:17-26

With Study Questions

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Now it happened on a certain day, as He was teaching, that there were Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting by, who had come out of every town of Galilee, Judea, and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was *present* to heal them. ¹⁸ Then behold, men brought on a bed a man who was paralyzed, whom they sought to bring in and lay before Him. ¹⁹ And when they could not find how they might bring him in, because of the crowd, they went up on the housetop and let him down with *his* bed through the tiling into the midst before Jesus. ²⁰ When He saw their faith, He said to him, “Man, your sins are forgiven you.” ²¹ And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, “Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?” ²² But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, He answered and said to them, “Why are you reasoning in your hearts? ²³ Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Rise up and walk’? ²⁴ But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins” – He said to the man who was paralyzed, “I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.” ²⁵ Immediately he rose up before them, took up what he had been lying on, and departed to his own house, glorifying God. ²⁶ And they were all amazed, and they glorified God and were filled with fear, saying, “We have seen strange things today” (Luke 5:17-26)!

Review

We now see the ministry of Jesus moving into high velocity. Luke had concerned himself with writing an “**orderly account**” (Luke 1:3) of the Christian faith, of the promise of God fulfilled in His Son. Luke began with very a very detailed chronicling of the birth of John the Baptist and of Jesus Himself, along with a brief account of Jesus as twelve-year-old child (Luke 2:41). He also records John the Baptist seeking to prepare the people for the glorious, yet devastating presence of Christ (Luke 3).

Jesus is then baptized, anointed by the Holy Spirit, and begins His ministry (Luke 3:21-23). It begins with His being tempted by the devil and overcoming (Luke 4) then returning to Galilee in the **“power of The Spirit (Luke 4:14)**. Remarkably, He begins His ministry by teaching. But His teaching, unlike any before or after Him, was legitimately about Himself (Luke 4:21). This was not well-received by all, that church service ending with the congregation seeking to **“throw Him down over the cliff” (Luke 4:29)**.

Yet His detractors would not slow Him down. He continued to teach and then began to heal and cast out demons. Some of His healing was intimate, as with Peter’s mother-in-law (Luke 4:38, 39) and others very public. Along with this we read of Jesus teaching on the Lake of Gennesaret and calling His first disciples (Luke 5:1-11). This was followed by His healing of a leper, which brings us to this event.

Now it happened on a certain day, as He was teaching, that there were Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting by, who had come out of every town of Galilee, Judea, and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was present to heal them (Luke 5:17).

A Scrutinizing Audience

Clearly, Jesus had gotten the attention of Galilee, Judea and Jerusalem. It was what might have been considered the entire religious world, at least according to the Jews, which at the time was God’s own church. One can imagine the Pharisees and the teacher of the law applying their tight scrutiny to every word Jesus might speak. As we shall see, they were not a charitable audience. They were looking to be accusatory and would run every syllable out of the mouth of the Savior through their most negative sifters.

Nonetheless, there was something there that could not be refuted. **“The power of the Lord was present to heal them.”** Would they be the recipients of such power? Who knows where they would end up in the final reckoning? But right now, their house is on fire and there is an ample, willing, powerful hose of living water in their midst. But instead of availing themselves of power and refreshment, they prefer to argue about the

syntax of the instruction in the training manual (of course the instruction has no fault, but people often prefer to tinker than apply).

Then behold, men brought on a bed a man who was paralyzed, whom they sought to bring in and lay before Him. ¹⁹ And when they could not find how they might bring him in, because of the crowd, they went up on the housetop and let him down with *his* bed through the tiling into the midst before Jesus (Luke 5:18, 19).

Getting Our Friends to Jesus

It is difficult to evaluate the entirety of the motivation of these five men. Similar to the thief crucified next to Jesus, they had somehow concluded that Jesus was the source of something powerful and wonderful. And their love for their friend is revealed in their undeterred quest to somehow get him into the presence of Christ.

It will be shown momentarily that they were men of faith, but faith in what? Was it faith in the inerrancy of Scripture? In the deity of Christ, in justification by faith alone, the virgin birth, the resurrection of Christ (which had not yet happened)? When we talk of faith, what is it we must, at least initially, believe in order for that faith to be a true instrument of our salvation?

When **“Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness” (Galatians 3:6)** what did Abraham actually believe? Paul’s reference beckons back to Abram’s (before he was named Abraham) concern about having a child through whom the nation/kingdom God had promised would come. So, God took Abram for a walk and showed him the stars and promised, **“So shall your offspring be” (Genesis 15:5)**. And Abram **“believed the Lord.”**

So, what did Abraham believe? It wasn’t, at least initially, something about the Lord. *He believed the Lord!* This might sound as if I’m downplaying theology, which I am not. First, I am simply quoting the passage. Second, if you believe the Lord, you will believe what the Lord says (to us, in His word).

Abraham’s belief in the Lord is directly justified (shown to be genuine) by the fact that Abraham believed the Lord could and would do what He just said He would do (give him innumerable offspring). Bottom

line here, any accurate theology we have is the fruit of God saving us, it is not a fee we pay to somehow warrant God's love.

These guys were going to do whatever they could to get their friends to Jesus. Perhaps we can imitate that in our sharing of Christ with others. If Jesus, as I do think we can draw from Scripture, is present in His most sacred way during word and sacrament, perhaps we can seek to get our friends to where that meal takes place, church. Are you willing to be inconvenienced, to rip out a few tiles?

When He saw their faith, He said to him, "Man, your sins are forgiven you." ²¹ And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, "Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" ²² But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, He answered and said to them, "Why are you reasoning in your hearts? ²³ Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Rise up and walk' (Luke 5:20-23)?

Church Interrupted

I recall attending a church service when an ambulance flew by with a very loud and distracting siren. The pastor took a moment to pray for whoever might have been in the ambulance. It seemed very real to me. God had providentially interrupted the service and the pastor responded.

Over the years we've had this type of thing happen. Someone getting sick or some other emergency during church. Sometimes the liturgy changes and we need to respond accordingly. Jesus must have noticed the debris from the roof settling on the floor as these five interrupted His lesson. He responded only the way the Man who is God could respond.

When He saw their faith, He proclaimed forgiveness. Perhaps you've noticed though that this is a bit odd. Jesus saw "**their faith**" *ten pistin auton* (plural) He forgave the paralytic (singular). What do we make of this? Maybe Jesus also saw the faith of the man on the bed. We certainly shouldn't conclude that there is forgiveness apart from personal/individual faith.

But we should also acknowledge, as the Bible so often repeats, that the faith of one can somehow extend into the advantage of others, as Calvin wrote,

Now, as Christ granted to their *faith* the favour which he bestowed on the *paralytic*, a question is usually raised on this passage: how far do men derive advantage from the faith of others? And, first, it is certain, that the faith of Abraham was of advantage to his posterity, when he embraced the free covenant offered to him and to his seed. We must hold a similar belief with regard to all believers, that, by their faith, the grace of God is extended to their children and their children's children even before they are born. The same thing takes place in infants, who are not yet of such an age as to be capable of faith. With regard to adults, on the other hand, who have no faith of their own, (whether they be strangers, or allied by blood,) the faith of others can have nothing more than an indirect influence in promoting the eternal salvation of their souls.¹

We can build more on this at another time. For now, let us recognize that Jesus grouped these faithful together in such a way as to make a proclamation of forgiveness to the one. And it was this which upset the room!

Who Does He Think He Is?

These elite theologians weren't altogether inaccurate with their objection. It is only God who can forgive sins, at least in an ultimate sense. I can forgive a sin against myself and am called to (Matthew 6:12). I can also proclaim forgiveness, as we do in the pardon of sin in a church service. But neither I, nor any other churchmen, are actually doing the pardoning. God is the ultimate offended party of any sin, and He alone has the prerogative to forgive.

The scribes and Pharisees knew this so barked in disapproval. Jesus, in their eyes, was a speaking blasphemy (speech which defames the Divine Majesty)! If Jesus is not God, they are accurate in their objection. Coming to a conclusion regarding who Jesus is changes everything. This ushered my mind to a quote by C. S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity*:

¹ Calvin, J., & Pringle, W. (2010). *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Vol. 1, p. 393). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.

Truly, we need the grace of God to have an accurate grasp of who Jesus is. We see it in His words with Peter.

**He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" ¹⁶ Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."
¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven (Matthew 16:15-17).**

Jesus was not unaware of his spiritual/intellectual environment. The scribes and Pharisees must have been thinking something that warranted His next words.

Which Is Easier?

There is a bit of debate regarding the answer to the question Jesus posits, **"Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Rise up and walk?'"** It might not be entirely necessary to answer the question since the answer is not given in this particular account, but I will hazard a guess. If all we're talking about is saying words, they're both the

same. But if we're talking about bringing reality to those words, I would say the former (your sins are forgiven) is more difficult. Why?

It may be true that all might be immediately impressed when the paralytic is healed, but that is not really the question. As we read through the Gospels and Acts we will see many people healed by the Apostles. But the Apostles did not have to go to a cross in order for those healings to be achieved. The heart of the mission of Jesus was to go to a cross, take upon Himself the sins of the world, become sin (2 Corinthians 5:21), bear the wrath of God (Isaiah 53:4, 5), in order for our sins to be forgiven.

It is difficult to imagine that would be something Jesus would momentarily forget when pardoning sinners. When God pardons our sin, He is not ignoring it or pretending it didn't happen. A payment was made for it. It was a payment that caused Jesus, in anticipation of it, to produce sweat which became, "**like great drops of blood**" (Luke 22:44). In my view, the healing we're about to read of is the easier of the two. As we will read in the next verse, the one (the healing) is designed to authenticate the other (the power to forgive).

But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins" – He said to the man who was paralyzed, "I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house" (Luke 5:24).

That You May Know

We see here one of the many explanations we find in Scripture as to why Jesus did miracles. This is not to extract His love and compassion from the event. But if you examine miracles in the Bible, you will find that they almost always are attached to authenticating the words of the one performing them. This is one of the means by which God bears witness to His word. For example, of Paul and Barnabas Luke will later write,

Therefore they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands (Acts 14:3).

Immediately he rose up before them, took up what he had been lying on, and departed to his own house, glorifying God. ²⁶ And they were all amazed, and they glorified God and were filled with fear, saying, “We have seen strange things today” (Luke 5:25, 26)!

The Greater Problem

On occasion unbelieving friends in the community will come to my office for help in some area of their lives (relationships, work, discouragement, etc.). I try to make every effort to help them through the difficulty of the season. But the subtext of my efforts, which I seek to elevate to actual texts, is that there is a greater problem, a greater transition, which must be made. If Jesus is correct (and, of course, I think He is) my friend doesn't need a mere tweak of the wheel of his life, he needs a new life (Mark 8:35).

We see here an example of the answer of Jesus being far superior to the prayer. These five came that their friend might be healed. But all five of them have been dead for two thousand years. The man's paralysis in the grand scope of eternity was a minor inconvenience. It is, no doubt, grand that this man carried home that which carried him there. But to this day, they continue to glorify God as a victorious and eternal expression of being made truly whole, having sins vanquished by the blood of Christ.

Questions for Study

1. What kind of disposition should we bring to the teaching found in Scripture (page 3)?
2. Explain what Abraham believed in order to be counted by God as righteous (page 4)?
3. How much effort have you made to bring people to Christ? What does that look like (pages 4, 5)?
4. How does the faith of one person give advantage to others (pages 5, 6)?
5. Why was Jesus not blaspheming when he pardoned the sins of the paralytic (pages 6, 7)?
6. Discuss the question Jesus submitted as to which is easier, to heal or forgive (pages 7, 8).
7. In all the problems we find in humanity, which is our greatest? How is it resolved (pages 8, 9)?