

To Seek and To Save the Lost

Jesus Heals a Paralytic

Luke 5:17-26

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May 5, 2013

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Scripture

Luke recorded 21 miracles by Jesus in his Gospel.¹ R. C. Sproul states in his *Dust to Glory* lectures, “Miracles prove the truthfulness of the one who is performing them and prove that he is endorsed and blessed by God.”² In the case of Jesus, “God bore witness to the identity of Jesus through miracles.”³ That is, Jesus performed miracles to authenticate his claim to divine authority. Today we will examine the miracle of the healing of a paralytic.

Let’s read about Jesus healing a paralytic in Luke 5:17-26:

¹⁷ On one of those days, as he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was with him to heal. ¹⁸ And behold, some men were bringing on a bed a man who was paralyzed, and they were seeking to bring him in and lay him before Jesus, ¹⁹ but finding no way to bring him in, because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the midst before Jesus. ²⁰ And when he saw their faith, he said, “Man, your sins are forgiven you.” ²¹ And the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, saying, “Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?” ²² When Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answered them, “Why do you question in your hearts? ²³ Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Rise and walk’? ²⁴ But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the man who was par-

¹ Crossway Bibles, *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 1958.

² R. C. Sproul, *Dust to Glory: An Overview of the Bible with R. C. Sproul*, New Testament (Orlando, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2010), 49.

³ *Ibid.*, 49.

alyzed—"I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go home."

²⁵ And immediately he rose up before them and picked up what he had been lying on and went home, glorifying God.

²⁶ And amazement seized them all, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, "We have seen extraordinary things today." (Luke 5:17-26)

Introduction

I grew up during apartheid in South Africa. When I was a student at the University of Cape Town I spent my vacations working at Freddy's Gold Mine in the town of Welkom. During a winter vacation I was asked to referee a rugby match between the residents of Freddy's Gold Mine and a neighboring gold mine. On the day of the rugby match I noticed that there were about one thousand spectators at the game. Since there were no seats, they all stood around the edge of the field, each team's supporters on opposite sides. I should mention that I was the only white person there that day!

The team from Freddy's Gold Mine was vastly superior to the other team, and they were beating the other team badly. About halfway through the second half of the game, the other team managed to get a breakthrough and appeared to score a try (which is like a "touchdown"). Unfortunately, just before they scored the try they committed a blatantly illegal pass. So, naturally, I disallowed the try and called them back to restart the game at the point of the infraction. However, the other team started arguing with me (which is not at all appropriate in rugby). I insisted that I was correct, and they insisted that I was wrong. In a few moments things became extremely tense, as they were very unhappy with my ruling. They crowded in on me demanding that I reverse my ruling. I then noticed that hundreds of spectators were slowly walking on to the field toward me. I did not know what to do.

Fortunately, the captain of Freddy's Gold Mine came to

the rescue. He saw that things were about to get really ugly, and so he said that I should award them the try. I was very happy to do so! And disaster for me was averted!

As the referee, I had the authority to officiate the game. But the opposing team and spectators challenged my ruling and my authority. There was a very tense standoff between hundreds of people (who disagreed with my ruling) and me.

Jesus faced growing opposition to his ministry. In today's lesson regarding the healing of a paralytic, Luke tells us about a tense standoff between Jesus and opponents of his ministry.

Lesson

The analysis of the healing of a paralytic as set forth in Luke 5:17-26 will show us that that Jesus has divine authority to forgive sins.

I. **The Case of the Healing of a Paralytic Shows Us that Jesus Provokes Hostility (5:17)**

First, the case of the healing of a paralytic shows us that Jesus provokes hostility.

Luke said that **on one of those days, as Jesus was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem (5:17a)**. Luke did not identify the time or place of this incident. The significant point is that **Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there**, listening to Jesus as he **was teaching**. And there were many of them there as they had come from **every village of Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem**.

At this point in Luke's Gospel Jesus had been preaching and performing miracles for about a year. Reports about Jesus went everywhere, and great crowds gathered to hear him and

to be healed of their infirmities (Luke 5:15; cf. 4:37). Understandably, even **Pharisees and teachers of the law** wanted to know more about Jesus and his message. That is why they were present when Jesus was teaching on this occasion.

But who were the **Pharisees and teachers of the law**? This is the first time in Luke's Gospel that we read about **Pharisees and teachers of the law**.

The **Pharisees** were one of four major religious groups in first-century Judaism—Sadducees, Essenes, and Zealots being the others. The **Pharisees** were a non-priestly or lay separatist movement whose goal was to keep the nation faithful to the Mosaic Law. In order to do this, they had a very developed tradition that gave rulings on how the law applied to a variety of possible situations.⁴ For example, the fourth commandment says, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." Then it goes on to state that on the Sabbath no work must be done (Exodus 20:8–11). But the **Pharisees** asked, "What is work?" and went on to define it under thirty-nine different headings, which they called "Fathers of Work." Even that was not enough. Each of these headings was greatly subdivided. Thousands of rules and regulations began to emerge. These were called the "Oral Law," and they began to be set even above the Ten Commandments.⁵

The **teachers of the law** were religious lawyers who supported the development of this extra-biblical tradition. Usually called "scribes," they are often linked with the Pharisees (5:21, 30; 6:7; 11:53; 15:2) or the chief priests (9:22; 19:47; 20:1, 19; 22:2, 66; 23:10). They could rule on the religious legality of an issue from a pharisaic point of view, although their opinions on any given issue were hardly unanimous. They functioned like religious parliamentarians for the

⁴ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke Volume 1: 1:1–9:50*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1994), 478-79.

⁵ William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 72.

Pharisees. It is helpful to note that **teachers of the law** were Pharisees, but not all Pharisees were **teachers of the law**.⁶

The **Pharisees and teachers of the law** had a growing concern about Jesus' teaching and popularity because he did not teach in accordance with their understanding of the Law. So, a major standoff was brewing between the **Pharisees and teachers of the law** on one side and Jesus on the other side.

Luke also noted that **the power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal** (5:17b). God was authorizing Jesus **to heal**.

The ministry of Jesus provoked hostility from those opposed to him. Even today, people are not neutral toward Jesus. Those who are not disciples of Jesus are hostile to Jesus.

II. **The Context of the Healing of a Paralytic Shows Us that Jesus Claims Authority (5:18-20)**

Second, the context of the healing of a paralytic shows us that Jesus claims authority.

While Jesus was teaching in someone's home, **some men were bringing on a bed a man who was paralyzed, and they were seeking to bring him in and lay him before Jesus** (5:18). Mark tells us in his Gospel that four men were carrying the paralytic, **but finding no way to bring him in to the house, because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the midst before Jesus** (5:19).

Typical houses in those days had flat roofs. It had beams with transverse rafters overlaid with brushwood, tree branches, etc., on top of which was a thick blanket of mud or clay mixed with chopped straw, beaten and rolled.⁷ The friends

⁶ Bock, 479.

⁷ William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, vol. 11, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953-2001), 295.

opened a hole in the roof and lowered the paralytic and set him down in front of Jesus.

It is worth noting the love and perseverance of the friends to get the paralytic to Jesus. How much do we love our unsaved friends? How hard will we work to get our unsaved loved ones to Jesus?

And when Jesus saw their faith, he said, “Man, your sins are forgiven you” (5:20). Jesus’ statement is unexpected. Clearly the paralytic wanted to be healed. After all, Jesus healed everyone who came to him for healing. So, we might have expected Jesus to say something like, “Be healed.” But he did not.

We might speculate as to why Jesus said this. We know that unresolved guilt can in fact paralyze human beings, not just emotionally and psychologically, but physically too. It may be that this man had a deeply rooted guilt problem that was the cause of his paralysis. However, we must be careful here, because elsewhere in the New Testament Jesus makes it abundantly clear that you cannot always assume that a person’s sickness is directly related to his sin. We don’t want to draw any conclusions like that from the text. But Jesus apparently did notice a relationship between his sin and his suffering.⁸

It is clear that Jesus made this statement in the presence of the Pharisees and teachers of the law because he was claiming divine authority to forgive sins.

But this claim by Jesus only led to a confrontation with the Pharisees and teachers of the law.

III. The Confrontation During the Healing of a Paralytic Shows Us that Jesus Confronts Error (5:21-24)

Third, the confrontation during the healing of a paralytic shows us that Jesus confronts error.

⁸ R. C. Sproul, *A Walk With God: An Exposition of Luke* (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1999), 90.

As soon as Jesus told the paralytic that his sins were forgiven, **the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, saying, “Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?”** (5:21). The religious leaders immediately accuse Jesus of blasphemy. They knew that only God has authority to forgive sins. Now Jesus was pronouncing forgiveness of sins, and by doing so Jesus was claiming authority and power that belonged to God alone. So, they were incensed.

When Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answered them, “Why do you question in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Rise and walk’?” (5:22-23). What did Jesus mean by this? Many New Testament scholars have debated the meaning of this question, but without arriving at an agreement. But in verse 24a, Jesus says that the reason he told the man, “Your sins are forgiven you,” is **“that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.”** Then Jesus **said to the man who was paralyzed, “I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go home”** (5:24b). Jesus took this opportunity not only to heal the paralytic, but also to make an astonishing claim.⁹ R. C. Sproul makes the following point:

Jesus here uses a title for himself that is very important. Throughout the New Testament we find various titles being used for Jesus: Teacher, Lord, Christ, Son of Man, Son of God, Lion of Judah, and Master. The title that is used more often than any other in the New Testament is the title, Christ, or Messiah. The second most common title is this one, the Son of Man. Although it is used some 83 times in the New Testament, in all but about three of these occasions it is used by Jesus himself. It is far and away Jesus’ preferred self-designation.

Why did Jesus call himself the Son of Man? It is tempting to make a quick judgment along these lines: When the Bible is talking about Jesus’ divine nature it calls him the Son of God,

⁹ Ibid., 90.

and when it is talking about his human nature it calls him the Son of Man. Unfortunately it does not work out that way because there are times when the title “Son of God” has reference to people who are simply sons by virtue of obedience. The title, Son of Man, is not a humble reference by Jesus to his own humanity. Certainly it contains within it an allusion to Jesus’ identification with us in our human situation. But it has its roots in the Old Testament, particularly in Daniel. In the vision that Daniel has into the very inner chambers of heaven we see the figure of the Son of Man. The Son of Man is sent to the world by the Ancient of Days, who is God. And the purpose for which the Son of Man is sent is to be the divine judge of all mankind. And so, far from being a humble self-designation of Jesus’ earthly humanity, it indicates that Jesus is identifying himself with this heavenly being. Every rabbi there would have caught the inference. This is a radical statement of ultimate authority, that causes untold consternation among the Pharisees and the theologians present.¹⁰

The Pharisees and teachers of the law did not believe that Jesus had divine authority. However, Jesus was preaching the good news of the kingdom of God. He was teaching people how to come into a right relationship with God and have their sins forgiven. His teaching directly contradicted the teaching of the Pharisees and teachers of the law. Their approach to God was filled with burdensome legalism. Jesus’ approach to God was filled with grace and mercy.

IV. The Consequences Resulting from the Healing of a Paralytic Show Us that Jesus Causes Amazement (5:25-26)

And finally, the consequences resulting from the healing of a paralytic show us that Jesus causes amazement.

Jesus told the paralytic to rise, pick up his bed, and go

¹⁰ Ibid., 91.

home. **And immediately he rose up before them and picked up what he had been lying on and went home, glorifying God** (5:25). Notice that the paralytic's healing was instantaneous. There was no recovery period. He was not stiff and sore from not using his limbs for years. He was able to walk and move as if he had never been paralyzed.

One commentator says that the healing of the paralyzed man functions, as Jesus intended, as a sign that his authority was real.¹¹ God was bearing witness to Jesus through this miracle that he did indeed have divine authority to forgive sins.

And amazement seized them all, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, "We have seen extraordinary things today" (5:26).

No wonder the crowds were amazed. The combination of healing, authority-claims, and the sharp dispute with the leading pressure group of the time, the Pharisees, was beyond anything they had ever known before. Interestingly, the Greek word for **extraordinary things** in verse 26 is *paradoxa*, "paradoxes," meaning "things you would not normally expect." Surely, there were plenty more to come.¹²

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the miracle of the healing of a paralytic as set forth in Luke 5:17-26, we should see in Jesus the authority of God to forgive sins.

The real issue in the Christian life is whether or not we see in Jesus the authority of God himself. Jesus really does have authority to forgive our sins. If you are paralyzed by guilt, take it to Jesus—he has divine authority to forgive you.¹³

¹¹ Tom Wright, *Luke for Everyone* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 61.

¹² *Ibid.*, 61.

¹³ Sproul, 92.

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and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

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PRAYER:

Jesus, you demonstrated that you have divine authority to forgive sins when you healed the paralytic. There may be some here today who are paralyzed by sin. Will you grant forgiveness of sins to all who come to you for forgiveness?

And for this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!