

Christ's Power to Forgive Sins

Gospel According to Luke

By Ken Wimer

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Shreveport Grace Church
2970 Baird Road
Shreveport, LA 71118

Website: www.shrevegrace.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/shreveportgracech

If you will, look with me in your Bibles to Luke 5. I'm going to read from verse 17 down to verse 26 and speak with you about Christ's power to forgive sins. Power to forgive sins. A very simple truth and yet profound, especially as we consider ourselves to be sinners and to consider Christ's power to forgive sins. It's not just a doctrine that we hold on to and memorize but that is truly the only way that any of us sitting here could ever have any kind of fellowship with God is through the LORD Jesus Christ.

We see that demonstrated here in Luke 5:17,

17 And it came to pass on a certain day, as He was teaching, that there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by, which were come out of every town of Galilee, and Judaea, and Jerusalem: [notice this statement] and the power of the LORD was present to heal them. 18 And, behold, men brought in a bed a man which was taken with a palsy: and they sought means to bring him in, and to lay him before Him. 19 And when they could not find by what way they might bring him in because of the multitude, they went upon the housetop, and let him down through the tiling with his couch into the midst before Jesus. 20 And when He saw their faith, He said unto him, Man, thy sins are forgiven thee. 21 And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, Who is this which speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone? 22 But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, He answering said unto them, What reason ye in your hearts? 23 Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk? 24 But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins, (He said unto the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house. 25 And immediately he rose up before them, and took up that whereon he lay, 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 to day.

Twice in this portion we have the word "forgive." Actually it means literally "to send away." It's used in a negative sense of a divorce. When you're through with somebody,

you send them away. But here it's used in the sense of sending away any guilt, any curse, any effect of sin. It gives you an idea of just the depth of this. It's not just standing up and saying, like you see some men today, making the sign of the cross and saying, "Your sins are forgiven you." Anybody can say that but our LORD said, "that you might know," in verse 24, "that the Son of man hath power," and that word "power" is a special word. It means not only the authority to forgive sins, but the ability.

There are some that are in positions of power that have authority to act but they don't have any ability to fix anything. Here comprised in this Word are those two thoughts: not only the authority to forgive sins and I'm thankful it doesn't stop there because we could sit here all day long and say, "Well, Christ has the authority to forgive sins," and it would be true, but that alone doesn't necessarily bring comfort. He could have stood over this man sick with palsy and said, "You don't have authority to forgive your sins." It's like one preacher used to say, "Don't stand up there and talk to people about the elements of bread and how it's life-giving and don't you know this about bread and that about bread." If a person is dying of hunger, what do they need? They need the bread. They need that bread being given to them and given the power to eat it. That's what I see here. It wasn't just that Christ said, "I have the authority," but, "I have the ability and with that ability I say to this man, Stand up and walk," and therein was the demonstration of that power.

They were right. Here are the two references in this text of the word "forgive." These Pharisees were opposing our LORD, they made a statement that they didn't realize what they were saying because it says, "who can forgive sins but God alone?" That's why we don't run to a man, we don't run to an experience, we don't run to an ordinance.

Who can forgive sins but God alone? And how are we to come? We've got to come through this one means. No other means would do. That was the faith that you see in verse 20 that the LORD commended of these that brought this man. You see, when God gives that faith, there is no obstacle. There's nothing that can stop them from getting to Christ because it's Christ that's drawing them all along. You see, he didn't just happen upon Christ. He heard of Him. These had heard of Him and they knew that unless they got this man unable to walk, to Christ, that there wasn't any hope. And we know that. You know, give me Christ or I die. Why? Because God alone can forgive sins. But what does it say about Him? He is God alone. You know, in Him dwelt the fullness of the Godhead bodily and so that's vital.

But also down in verse 24, the word "forgive" is used again. He says, "that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins, (He said unto the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch," thy bed. It was some sort of makeshift bed that they carried him on. Don't think of a full-blown couch here that they brought Him in. "And go into thine house." So even in the days of His flesh, while Christ was humbled on this earth as a man, He didn't cease to be God so He's the God-man. He didn't lose any part of His power. I know we sing that in one of the hymns that He gave up all but love, well, no, He didn't stop being God. That wasn't given up. He was the God-man.

But here all they could see was a man so that's the term that's used, "But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power," hath authority, hath ability. It's not within man. He didn't put any conditions on this one man and said, "Now, if you truly believe on Me or if you do this or that, you promise to be good if I raise you up, promise to go and join a church, be faithful, don't miss another worship service," all these things that men put. None of that.

In fact, we don't see anywhere even in this portion of Scripture that this man spoke except for after the LORD had healed him where it says that "he departed to his own house glorifying God." Who was he glorifying? Christ. Are you aware right now that we are in the presence of God Himself in the presence of His Son? We've just sung hymns, we've read Scriptures, all to His honor and glory. "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in their midst." Are we conscious of that? We've come in just as needy as this man sick of palsy. I hope you see yourself as needy. We were carried here. We didn't come on our own. The LORD drew us. You see, all of these things are set forth here. And it says, "hath power upon earth to forgive sins." He said unto this man, "Arise, and take up thy bed and go into thine house."

So let's look at this together for a few moments. When we talk about Christ's power to forgive sins, first of all, our LORD's teaching was one of power. You notice that's how this verse begins in Luke 5:17, "it came to pass on a certain day, as He was teaching." This is what we know as the doctrine of Christ. How is it we're going to know Christ? It's through His teaching. I know there are a lot that like to put the emphasis on His miracles but His miracles were but a confirmation of what He said; it was a visible manifestation. If you're in a class teaching, you teach the lesson but then you give illustrations and demonstrations. His healing was but a demonstration of His doctrine which was salvation is in Him and that's what we find set forth.

So what was our LORD's teaching? Well, obviously He taught about Him being the King, the Kingdom of God. He certainly taught on repentance but His teaching was also on forgiveness of sins. And this is the interesting part of what He taught was that not only did He show Himself to be the one through whom forgiveness is given, but you read some pretty strong language in Christ's teaching as to how we're to forgive one another. A lot of times it's good to dwell on how Christ has forgiven me, but then He puts us in a situation with somebody else and all of a sudden we halt, we pull back. But what do the Scriptures teach? Forgive as you've been forgiven.

You stop and think about the fact that God, if Christ has paid our debt, He does not impute, He does not charge to us our sin. So complete is His forgiveness. And I hear people say all the time, "Well, I can forgive but I can't forget." Now, wait a minute, how has Christ forgiven you, if He has? Do you realize how we forgive others is a demonstration of just how clearly we have learned His doctrine? Now, thankfully He doesn't judge us on our failure because we fail all the time, but there is some pretty strong language in Scripture that we find here. We can go out of here today rejoicing and saying, "I'm forgiven in Christ! Praise God!" and yet harbor in here some ill will and, you know, "If there's anybody, I'll never forgive that one." This is where we need to be brought low

at Christ's feet, every one of us, and consider how is it that God has forgiven me? You know, the Spirit will bring people to mind and when He does and causes you to look again to Christ even in yourself, you're brought low.

But notice this is part of Christ's teaching. It says here, "And it came to pass on a certain day," verse 17. And again, that "certain" doesn't mean just a general day. I love the word "certain." This was purposed. The LORD, He was God in the flesh but He orchestrated this whole event, the coming, the crowds, every part of it. It's like walking into a classroom and the teacher has everything set up with little stations and you're sitting there wondering, "What's this?" It's planned. There's a lesson plan here.

And the LORD did it in the face of these Pharisees and doctors of the law. Do you see that in verse 17? He was going to show them a lesson because these were men who considered themselves already to be just before God but not on the basis of the work of Christ. They're coming in another way.

And He would take one who was already excluded by default with his disease, you go back and study and read the Pharisees' teaching and their teaching of the law, that's why it says there they are doctors of the law. This was a condemned man by their own right. Their teaching was if this man were truly the LORD's he wouldn't be this way. You know the questions that they had asked: who has sinned? When the LORD healed the blind man, "Who has sinned, Him or his parents?" They're always looking for a reason why God should condemn others without ever seeing themselves as condemned. So His teaching here had everything to do with their obstinance and their blindness and lack of forgiveness themselves.

Look at a few Scriptures with me. Mark 11:25. So we're looking here at this first point: our LORD's teaching was one of His power to forgive sins. His teaching but what did He teach? Look in Mark 11 and look with me at verse 25, look at verse 24, "Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." These Pharisees, these doctors of the law, prided themselves in being men of prayer, at least outwardly. It wasn't true prayer but, "If you want to learn how to pray, watch us," and they would stand on the street corners. They made a visible public demonstration of their religion like many of you today. The LORD said, "When you pray, go in your closet." Prayer is an exercise of the heart of the Spirit directing the heart to the LORD.

But He says in verse 25, "And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses." Now, He's not making our salvation conditioned upon our forgiving but when He says, "when you stand praying and you have ought against any," it's not to be understood here as a condition but rather a demonstration. How is it that you can stand praying to the Father expecting your sins to be forgiven and yet all the while you harbor in your own heart ill will toward another? Much like the Pharisee and the publican where the Pharisee stood and thanked God he wasn't like that publican, an adulterer. These are matters of the heart

that God sees and understands. When you consider and this is the point here, I don't want us to just leave here informed about Christ's power to forgive but when you consider and He has forgiven you your sins, consider how He did it, it was unconditional and it was based upon His blood sacrifice, it was based upon a ransom that was satisfactory to a Holy God. Nothing more, nothing less and that's the only reason that Christ would ever forgive based upon those for whom He paid the debt.

That's clear over here in Ephesians 4:32 and I'm speaking to you of things well beyond my experience and I'll be the first to tell you I struggle with this as much as anybody because I'm in the flesh. I get upset and people upset me and when they do you wrong, your first reaction is you just want to write them off. Is there anybody that I'm not speaking to here? But yet the LORD constantly brings us back to consider if I'm His, how has He dealt with me? It's been in mercy. It's been in grace. Not for anything in me but in Him.

That's what we see here in Ephesians 4:32, verse 31, "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you." That word "put away" is the same sense of the word "divorce it; send it on its way." You stop and think and this is addressed to the church, those that profess to know Christ. All bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, where does that come from but harboring ill will toward another. Put it away. Send it off. Divorce it.

"And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another," there's the word, forgetting, and here's the part, "even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." You stop and think about what Christ did. He took upon Himself the guilt of sinners such as we are. I don't any illustration that I could give that could in any way demonstrate what it is for Christ to be the Substitute. I read recently a story that came close but, then again, you come back to the Scriptures and you think, "Well, this is just, it's like a candle compared to what Christ did." But the LORD used stories. He used illustrations of just what it means here, "even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you," and what He endured, taken upon Himself, the sin of His people.

This story was about some Scottish soldiers that had been forced by their Japanese captors to labor on a jungle railroad. Hard labor. And the conditions were very poor. It was very demanding. They were in forced labor camps at the hands of these Japanese and one day a shovel showed up missing. You think one little simple thing, a shovel. So, the officer in charge became enraged and he demanded that that shovel be produced or else, and when nobody in the squadron budged, the officer got his gun out and threatened to kill them all on the spot, wipe them out. That's how meaningless they were to him. It was obvious the officer meant what he said. Finally, one man stepped forward and the officer put away his gun and he picked up a shovel and he beat this man to death. This is a true story. He beat this man to death for stepping forward and when it was over, the survivors picked up the bloody corpse and carried it with them to a second tool check and at that second tool check, the missing shovel was found. There was one extra shovel. There had been a miscount on the first check. And the word spread like wildfire throughout the whole camp that an innocent man had stepped forward and had died to save the others.

I don't know about you but when I read it I couldn't help but think this is just but a small picture of what our LORD Jesus Christ willingly endured for the sake of others, for the sake of sinners. He was more than just an innocent man, He was righteousness itself. And you stop and think who it was that He laid down His life to save: guilty sinners. So, when we read here about His power to forgive sins, may the LORD enable us to see that we're not better than that man that they brought, that Christ Himself had already stricken with – He's God, He had stricken Him with this illness all this time to bring Him to this one point, to deliver him – and that men may know that He had the power and the authority and not just that but the ability to forgive sins.

So, that's the lesson. This was His teaching. This is what we find our LORD doing here. But secondly, come back to our text here in Luke 5. As I said, our LORD was dealing with a generation of self-righteous religionists whose teaching on forgiveness of sins was at best partial, prejudicial. I can forgive this one but not that one. You know, the LORD told them, He said, it's nothing, anybody can invite people over to eat that they get along with but why don't you go out there on the highways and the byways and bring in the lame, the halt, the blind and provide for them? Again, we do this from time to time but we have no understanding at all until we see ourselves as lame, blind and halt, of just how infinite, as Brother Lane said, the 'Infinite Stoop', God humbling Himself, not to save the self-righteous, but sinners. Sinners Jesus came to save. This was the lesson the LORD was teaching these self-righteous Pharisees and if there are any still in that self-righteousness reading these words right now, you're going to feel uncomfortable and you ought to. I know this is where the LORD dealt with me. Sin clings to us, but self-righteousness is what condemns us, thinking that somehow we're better than another.

So, this teaching, He was teaching that there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by, even that was purposed. I know He came to save His sheep but He didn't do it in a corner. He did it in front of these self-righteous that would, "come out of every town of Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem."

Notice when it says there in verse 17, "the power of the LORD was present to heal them." When it says "the power of the LORD was present" it's talking about Christ. He was present. He is the power of the LORD. He is God's Power unto salvation.

If you look over in 1 Corinthians 1, look there with me. 1 Corinthians 1 and look in verse 23. It's the same Word that we're going to see here in verse 24 but it says, "we preach Christ crucified." You see, Christ came to this earth not just to demonstrate that He was God but He came to save sinners such as this one. I mentioned last time there were those that Christ healed that weren't necessarily saved. He healed them physically. But to say to a man, "Your sins are forgiven," this man was special. This was not like any that had come and gotten healed and gone their way. You know, there are some that the LORD when they are on their deathbed, He heals them, even in the world, whether they're God's children or not. There are some that will stand up and testify, "You know, I was on a deathbed and God healed me," and they go their way feeling like they've been given another lease on life but all it is, unless they're the LORD's and He's paid their debt, it's

just a lease on physical life. They are still rebels. They are still lost. And all of that adds to their condemnation if they're not brought to look to Christ alone. But here was a man, when the LORD said to Him, "Your sins are forgiven you," in verse 20, He was looking at this one as one for whom He would pay his debt. That's the only way sins can be forgiven.

It says, "seeing their faith," and certainly there is faith but where does faith look? To the Savior. To the Crucified One. It's not faith that saves. Faith didn't die on the cross. Faith isn't the Sacrifice. Christ is. He is the power of God and that power of the LORD was present to heal them not just physically, but spiritually. But who does He heal? Those that He has purposed to heal.

But that's what Paul describes here in 1 Corinthians 1:23, "But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock." These Pharisees sat and watched this. Here was the power of the LORD present to heal but when they heard His teaching and saw the demonstration of it, what was their reaction? "Who is this that speaks blasphemies?" You see, until the LORD gives you eyes to see, all you can do is push this One away. Reject. Rebel. That's the rebellion of the heart.

"And unto the Greeks foolishness." You see, the Jews prided themselves on their righteousness, the Greeks prided themselves in their wisdom. "Well, let's just sit down," and like pulling on the old beard, "let's just look at this a little more carefully here and see if we can figure out really what this means."

But notice verse 24, "unto them which are called," the called, "both Jews and Greeks," that's a way of saying throughout the world, "Christ," what? "The power of God, and," what? "The wisdom of God." If you want to know where salvation is, the power, the authority, the ability, is in Christ alone and the wisdom of God, there's none that are going to know God in wisdom apart from Christ revealing it. That's what wisdom is. It's not just knowledge, it's the revelation of God through His Son, the LORD Jesus Christ.

So, you see here our LORD was dealing with a generation of self-righteous religionists whose teaching on forgiveness, their teaching at best was partial and prejudicial. If God has forgiven your or me, I can tell you it's wholly based upon what God purposed to do in His Son alone. Not anything in you. Not anything in me. And if you think that, then you're still blind, you're still lost.

But, thirdly, come back to Luke 5. Our LORD not only taught His power to forgive and gave an example of it, but He demonstrated it with one who was an off-cast of society. When we talk about forgiveness of sins, we tend to think, "Well, I can forgive this in somebody but not that." So what have we done? Just like people that are in false religion, they categorize sins. Some they think are worse than others. That's the way men think. But sin is sin before the LORD.

Here we see our LORD taking one who was an off-cast, he couldn't even come himself. You know, if these were modern day preachers, they would say, "Well, you know, take the first step and then God will do the rest." He couldn't.

And not even the men that brought Him, you see, it's not even the faith of others that can deliver us. People say, "Well, if we just pray enough for this one, then the LORD will deliver them." No.

They brought him. They laid him right at Christ's feet, but if Christ had done nothing but turn and walk away, he would have been no better for it. It's not in our coming. It's not in how we got there. We know if any come, the LORD has drawn him.

But this power to forgive and this example of forgiveness was with the worst of the worst. That's what we see here. And it takes the LORD and that power of the LORD to deliver. So, that's we see.

The point I want you to see here is this man didn't come on his own. Our LORD drew him and that's what He does, He draws needy sinners to Himself. Not just as an object of His mercy. Mercy is what...if you're breathing this side of hell, you're living by God's mercies. But this is an object of mercy and grace. There were many that had died of this very same disease that never saw the LORD and even in that state of disease they were better off than after their death, unless they were the LORD's. A lot of people say, "Well, they're better off." Not necessarily. You could be invalid all your lifetime and God appoint you to that and that's still better than what remains in judgment unless the LORD has paid your debt. You see, people don't reason that way but that's the truth.

But here was one that the LORD drew. He not only demonstrates here His power to forgive but even given the desire. When I read this, I think of how the LORD drew me, a guilty sinner. You know, this desire where it says there, "behold, men brought in a bed a man which was taken with a palsy," notice, "they sought means to bring him in." But even the seeking is of the LORD.

Then you look at their persistence in verse 19. They persisted, "when they could not find by what way they might bring him in because of the multitude, they went upon the housetop." They had flat roofs, back in the day, laid down with tile. They took one off and let Him down right there where our LORD stood. But where does that persistence come from to get to Christ? Well, it's the LORD that gives it. He's doing the drawing, He gives the persistence and even the faith when the LORD said, "when He saw their faith." Faith comes by hearing, hearing by the Word of God. It's not something that some are born with and some aren't. None of us has faith and if we have it, it's because the LORD gave it to us.

So, there we see our LORD then drawing this one and then declaring unto him, "Your sins are forgiven. Who can forgive sins but God alone?" They answered their own question. When we say, "Come to Christ," Who is it we come to? We're coming to God Himself and we're coming in the Way that He's ordained. But we come because He drew

us. No man can come unto Christ unless the Father draw him. That's a clear truth of Scripture.

So, our LORD forgave this man's sins, not only as a visible proof of His teaching that He was indeed the Son of God, but to show the very reason why He came to earth. This man had nothing to offer to Christ. Christ didn't come to be ministered unto. You know, people say that, "Only one life, twill soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last." I don't find that in Scripture. It is true, only one life, twill soon be past, but only what Christ has done shall last.

What did the LORD do for this man sick of palsy? Everything. Everything and that's why when He raised him up, what did he do? He went away glorifying God. It didn't begin with "I," "Well, I sure am glad I did this. Or I sure am glad I persisted. Or I sure am glad I was in the right place at the right time."

Glorifying God. Do you know what it is to glorify God? It's to give Him all the glory. There is not one iota in his will or in his way or in his thoughts where he could say he had anything to contribute in this matter. It was all the LORD. And I'll tell you, if you're the LORD's that's your testimony. You know, knowing that, the LORD in His mercy puts us in situations where He reminds us if it hadn't been for His grace and mercy toward us we'd be just like that one we hate or are angry at, we're upset with, or think, "I could never forgive them." I'm not saying we don't have the thoughts but I'll tell you, the thought of Christ and what He has done brings us to bow and to seek Him again and to say, "LORD, be merciful to me, the sinner."

Well, I trust and pray that the LORD will bless this to teach us. I trust we leave here amazed. I don't want this to be just like an interesting message on forgiveness of sins. It says there in verse 26, "they were all amazed," overwhelmed, inexplicable. Do you know anywhere in any other teaching in any other religion throughout the world where forgiveness of sins is ever set forth in this manner? I don't. Go study it if you want. It's just a waste of time but, I mean, everything is conditional. You do this, you do that and God will do this. There is no hope there. What's amazing, we sing, "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that," what? "saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now I'm found. Was blind but now I see."