

## The Greatest Miracle of All

Luke 5:17-20

October 16, 2016

Hear in Luke 5, join me in verse 17. Follow along, as I read the account. "On one of those days, as he," 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. And the power of the Lord was with him to heal. 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, but finding no way to bring him in, because of the crowd, they went up on the roof, let him down with his bed through the tiles into the midst before Jesus. And when he saw their faith, he said, 'Man, your sins are forgiven you.'

"And the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, saying, 'Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?' 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?" But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.'

"He said to the man who was paralyzed- 'I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home.' Immediately he rose up before them and picked up what he had been lying on and went home, glorifying God. And amazement seized them all, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, 'We have seen extraordinary things today.'"

Incredible account, isn't it? It really does grip the imagination, holds our attention from start to finish. We can actually divide these verses from verse 17-26, you actually divide this account into two sections. First section, which is what we'll cover today, that's verses 17-20. Luke is really introducing us to the scene there. And as we are introduced to the scene, there's a tension that builds and it brings us to the climax, in the greatest miracle of all, which is the forgiveness of sins. That leads us right into the second section, verses 21-

26. As the tension ramps up again, and builds to yet another climax of really what's a lesser miracle, as Jesus makes the paralytic stand up and walk home.

There's a certain verb that's repeated in the final verse of each of those two sections, once in verse 20 and once in verse 26. And that verb connects the two sections thematically, it's the verb to see, to see. In Greek, it's *horao*. The final sentence in verse 26, the testimony of the crowd, "We have seen extraordinary things today."

And that word that's translated there, extraordinary things, that's the word *paradoxos*. And that's where we get our own word, English word, paradox. The word paradox refers to what seems to be, what is apparently a contradiction. Something that's unexplainable to us, something that doesn't seem to make sense at first glance. What seemed to be contradictory to them was this, "How can a man forgive sin?"

The other paradox in the text is connected not to what they saw, but to what Jesus saw. So back up to verse 20 and notice

what prompted his pronouncement of forgiveness. Again, that word *horao*, when he saw their faith. Same verb used in verses 20 and verse 26, the verb *horao*. Jesus was there seeing something and he was seeing something deeper. And what he saw was a paradox of a different kind.

He was watching the paradox of forgiveness unfold before this crowded room. Question is this, here's the paradox: How can a holy God, one who gives laws, one who judges according to those laws impartially, one who is utterly inflexible in his administration of justice, one who will not bend those rules one fraction of a degree, even for the sake of compassion, even for the, for pity's sake because a judge like that would be perverting justice not upholding it right? So how can a God like that, forgive a guilty sinner?

That's another, different kind of paradox, isn't it? Here's the language that Paul used in Romans 3:26. How can God remain just not budging a single millimeter from the demands of holy justice, and yet justify the guilty sinner? Paul answered that paradox even as he raised it there in Romans 3:26, that God put

forth Jesus to satisfy the dreadful demands of God's holy justice, "so that God may be both just, and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus Christ."

Folks, that is the greatest miracle God has ever performed. It reveals the profound depths of the many facets of his holy character. The forgiveness of the guilty sinner reveals God's holiness, reveals his justice, reveals his mercy, reveals his compassion, his power, his goodness, and ultimately, it reveals his great wisdom.

How can he bring these two things in tension? How can he bring them together? The demands of justice and his desire to show mercy. It's great wisdom, involves matters of incredible paradox; one in the incarnation of the Son of God, who became the sinless Son of man, the other in the forgiveness of sin, on the basis of faith. We know all that simply as the gospel. Amen? With the communion table set before us, it's the perfect day to consider the text that we're dealing with right now. Like all the miraculous works of salvation that God performs this one too, happened in a historical context. There was something that

happened in time and space, there was a real life situation with a real life drama that was unfolding. This one happened in a very crowded room, some of whom were critics. Some were undecided, others were believing.

Take a look then at point one in your outline. Though it was a room full of Pharisees, for Jesus, this was an occasion for influence, an occasion for influence and we'll see that in just a moment. Look at verse 17, says "On one of those days, as he was teaching." There is Jesus again teaching. Then Mark tells us that they were all crowded into a local home in Capernaum, probably Peter's home.

In the previous account, we know that Jesus cleansed the leper, he'd been out and about in Galilee with his disciples. He was not at Capernaum, but according to Matthew chapter 9, verse 1, "He has returned to his own city." He's returned to Capernaum. And again, it's likely they were in Peter's home, pretty good size home, modest middle class, but still quite large. It was large enough for Peter to have his mother-in-law staying there, large enough for other disciples to be hosted

there, for Peter to host Jesus there. And once again, we find Jesus, teaching.

Though it's not explicit in the text, I believe that the subject of his teaching had to do with the ministry of the Son of Man. I'll try to prove that to you next week. But you say why do you say that because down in verse 24, when Jesus is answering his detractors, he told them, "But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins."

Then he commanded the paralytic to rise. I think it's connected with what he was teaching there. That's the first mention of this title, Son of Man in Luke's gospel, but it will by no means be the last. This is Jesus' favorite self-designation. He used it 25 times in this gospel alone. I believe Jesus had been explaining on this occasion, the ministry of the Son of Man. So when he was challenged about the extent of his authority or the extent of the authority of the Son of Man, this occasion becomes an illustration of the extent of his authority, the extent of the authority of the Son of Man. That's just

getting slightly ahead of ourselves. We'll come back to that next week.

But continuing on in verse 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," Stop there for a second. Let's introduce ourselves to these characters. I know you're familiar with some of these, but let me unpack it just a little bit for you. The Pharisees and the teachers of the law. Who are they? And what are they doin' there? The presence of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law in Capernaum, of all places, is a really, really big deal. It's easy for us to read right past that and not to understand how significant this is. These guys did not come visiting Capernaum, a fishing village on a whim. They were there for a purpose. They were there as an official delegation.

Pharisees were, they were a fairly small sect of Jews, only about 6000 of them in Israel during Jesus' day. But they were devout. These guys were serious minded men. Well educated layman actually. And though they were relatively few in number, their



influence far outweighed their numbers. They had a massive, popular appeal. There were men of very significant influence among the masses.

Back in Maccabean revolt in 168 BC, that's when the Pharisees sect rose into prominence in that period, almost 200 years before Jesus' ministry here. They were known as separatists; they were like an ancient holiness movement. Pharisee actually means separated ones. It comes from the Hebrew verb *parad*, which means to divide or to separate. Josephus, he gives us a lot of information about the Pharisees he spends time describing the Pharisees in his *Antiquities of the Jews*. And he calls it one of the three influential sects within Judaism at that time, along with the Essenes and the Sadducees.

All of those, the Pharisees, the Essenes, the Sadducees, all three of those groups were reactions to the spread of Greco Roman culture at that time and since called Hellenism. The Essenes, they resisted the spirit of Hellenism by running away from it completely. They were strict separatists think like monks, they wanted to get out of there, out of the cities, away

from Hellenism, live in caves in the deserts and all the rest. You may remember the Dead Sea Scrolls they were discovered at a community of Essenes called the Qumran community. That was a commune of Essenes.

So the Essenes ran away from Hellenism, the Sadducees, they were exactly the opposite. They were the liberals who embraced Hellenism, and they used it for their own political and economic advantage. Very political, thoroughly immersed in the culture, that was the Sadducees. And remember, those are the guys that are running the temple. Those are the guys who are in charge of the worship in Israel, that irked people. Like the Pharisees, they were very different, they agreed with the Essenes, who saw the Sadducees compromise and their embrace of Hellenistic culture as completely reprehensible, even a reason for God's wrath and judgment on the nation.

But the radical departure from society like the Essenes wanted to do, that was totally impractical. They also saw it as wrongheaded. The Pharisees, they decided we can't leave society, we need to stay in society, because we need to influence people.

Eventually, they wanted to reinvigorate and reform the Jewish faith. But they remain separate themselves, from the Hellenizing forces, the pagan culture, they were trying to adhere as strictly as possible to the Torah.

Pharisees were, as I said, they were laymen. They were typically businessman, merchants, they were intelligent, they were business wise, they were savvy, often wealthy. In the practice of religion though, they were laymen. They were well studied. They were fairly well educated, but they held no official positions. So when people listened to the Pharisees, it was kind of like listening to a well educated layman of great influence. You know, the, the people who were in official positions, the priests and those kind of people, synagogue rulers.

People could look at them and say, Well, you've got an interest in what you're saying, after all, you're getting paid to do what you do, kind of like pastors. Uh, that's the pastor, he's paid to be good. But the, the Pharisees as laymen, not so much. They're doing that because they're convinced of the truth

of what they're saying. They're men of deep conviction. They're the theological conservatives of their day.

They really did believe the Scriptures; they spoke in categories of sin and righteousness. They hoped in the coming Messiah to break the power of the Romans, to fulfill God's restoration promises. And it was through their apparent piety, their outward observance of the law that the Pharisees garnered widespread respect among the people. And as I said, they exerted significant influence, disproportionate to their numbers. That's a brief explanation of the Pharisees.

What about the teachers of the law? Luke uses the word *nomodidaskalos*. Literally law teachers. It's interesting, he's, he's using a term that's not very common in Scripture. It's only used three times in the New Testament. And he's referring to a group that we more commonly know as the scribes, teachers of the law. He uses the word in Acts 5:34 to describe Gamaliel. And then in a critical way, Paul uses it in 1 Timothy 1:7 to describe those who "Desire to be teachers of the law," why do they desire to be teachers of the law, without understanding the

true nature of the law because they want honor, they want respect. This class of scholars, the scribes, the teachers of the law, they originated around the time of Ezra, a man of great learning and highly respected.

Ezra is kind of like the quintessential prototype of the, of the scribes. He was one of the chief figures of post Exilic Judaism. And he was part of a class of law experts called scribes. In a day when not everybody could write and read and scribes were very important, especially in the transmission of the scripture from one copy to another, the scribes were very important.

They arose to instruct, judge among the people. James Edwards, a commentator describes them as, "those who taught Torah in synagogues, and issued binding decisions on its interpretation." These guys have great influence. Very, very intelligent men came into the office of scribe. The scribes combined the offices of the Torah professor, the law professor, a teacher, a moralist, a civil lawyer and in that order. James Edwards goes on to say, "The erudition and prestige of scribes

reached legendary proportions by the first century, surpassing on occasion that of the high priest. Commoners deferred to scribes as they walked through the streets. The first seats in the synagogue were reserved for the scribes and people rose to their feet when they entered a room."

So when you think of the scribes, when you think of these law teachers, law professors, think of men who are respected. People defer to them, people get out of their way, they rise when they enter a room. They're honored, they're revered. They were quoted as authoritative sources, their words were used in debate, to settle arguments. So together, the scribes, the Pharisees, they posed a formidable force of influence.

These are devout men, pious men, they're learned, they're scholarly. These are men who wielded the greatest influence over the entire Jewish culture and nation. So here in Capernaum, they've arrived, is a weighty, influential force of Judaism and if we think about this in terms of like today's evangelicalism, it would be like all the celebrated, popular leaders of the evangelical world, names on all the books, speaking at all the

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conferences, and along with all the best scholars and seminary professors in all the evangelical seminaries, and all of them together visited one of our homes here in Greeley Colorado. That's what it's like.

You can imagine that these villagers in Capernaum are absolutely thrilled. Hey, we're on the map. We are important. We're honored that this important religious delegation would pay us a visit. Why are they there? These Pharisees, these law professors, they're not there as fans. They came to inspect Jesus' ministry. They're there to examine his methods. They're there to determine whether or not they're going to give him their stamp of approval. They're most certainly not there to learn from Jesus. They're there to judge him. They're there to give him a grade.

What prompted their coming? We talked about this a couple of weeks ago, Jesus had recently healed a leper, and the word about that healing had spread to talk about how he had done that healing in a most unconventional unorthodox manner. He actually touched the leper with his bare hands. That leper's cleansing

here was undeniable, but the jury was still out as to whether or not Jesus had become unclean in the process.

Jesus presented a pretty significant theological dilemma for the law experts who are all looking all through their books to see, what do we do with this? They'd never encountered any of this in any of their categories. Jesus was a phenomenon that seminary did not prepare them for. So the fact that these Pharisees, these law scholars came to Capernaum from all over Galilee and Judea, even from Jerusalem itself. You got to understand this indicates a fairly significant amount of planning, and communication, and logistical coordination.

No cell phones in that day, no Facebook, no spreading the word easily. This didn't happen just all of a sudden, they had to plan for this. They weren't there out of the mere curiosity. Luke wants us to see that, they're not there as fans. They've come to pass judgment. They came to scrutinize, to criticize, and give their for or against judgment.



In fact, when Luke introduces them, it, it's significant that he doesn't just tell them they're there as in physically present. Luke notes, their posture there in verse 17, doesn't it? He says they're sitting there. Quite a contrast, isn't it? Jesus is actively teaching. He's engaged in positive ministry, the Pharisees, the scribes, they are passively sitting there on their thrones, criticizing, passing judgment, wholly negative act in its portrayal here. So there's hostility implied by their presence in verse 17. They come to pass judgment and then they wanted to return and instruct the people of Israel, whether or not to trust or distrust Jesus, they'd have considered this to be their duty, their ministry, like their service to the nation. They're like watchdogs over Israel to keep them protected from all harmful influences and Jesus just might be that to Israel.

It's impossible, really to overstate the significance of the fact that this official delegation is here present on this day, these religious leaders, you know, I'm just speaking negatively, but positively, they represented a pretty enormous amount of influence over the people. They shaped their thinking. They influenced their opinions.

The Pharisees and the scribes are the ones who actually taught and shaped people's theology, how they thought about God, how they thought about life. They determine what was socially and culturally acceptable or unacceptable. So practically speaking, if these conservative religious establishment, if these people were on your side, well smooth sailing for the rest of your ministry, right? Doors are wide open to you. They would be your defenders, they would be your advocates, they would be giving you access through doors that would otherwise be locked to you. But offend them in any way, rock the boat just a little, you can forget it; your career is over in Israel.

You might as well give up any aspirations of influence, any desire for prominence. Forget fulfilling any ambitions to ascend into leadership and influence over the people. Oh, and you better forget about being Messiah. So verse 17, Jesus is teaching; Pharisees and scribes, they're sitting there. Front row seats of honor, no doubt and the rest of the Capernaum, packed all around them, craning their necks over each other's shoulders to see who's who, whose doing what, who's reacting.

You can picture the scene, Mark tells us that the place was packed, Mark 2:2, "Many were gathered together so that there was no more room, not even at the door. And Jesus was preaching the word to them." So that's the occasion. It was an occasion here for significant influence. Impress the Pharisees and law experts, you had it made, offend them, you're relegated to the outside. So all Jesus needed now was to impress them, which should be pretty easy, right?

This is for Jesus, point two, an opportunity for power. An opportunity for power. Look at verse 17 again. That last sentence at the end of the verse, very important detail in Luke's attempt to set the scene up for us. Pharisees and the teachers of the law were sitting there, "And the power of the Lord was with him to heal." So in light of the context, you need to see the significance of that. Jesus is teaching, Pharisees and seminary professors are all sitting there. They're deciding how to cast their votes. And Jesus just happens to have the power of the Lord with him to heal. Perfect. Jesus had an opportunity to demonstrate divine power. He had the opportunity to win the affirmation of the most influential body of delegates in all of Jewish society.

He's presented with an opportunity for massive influence here. All the important religious leaders are there listening to his amazing teaching, they're scrutinizing every word. And they know, because they've studied, they know without a doubt that he is the most precise, most accurate, most profound, most learned teacher they've ever heard. These men had been through the books, these men know the questions that most of us never even think to ask.

And as they're scrutinizing Jesus' teaching, they can't find him putting a word wrong. He doesn't need an editor, like most of us do. His teaching is unparalleled. Just one miracle will seal the deal. And he just happens to have the power of the Lord with him to do that very thing. By the way, what does that mean? Power of the Lord was with him to heal, does that mean the power came and went? It sometimes he had it and other times he didn't? I don't think so.

Best to see, I think this is an indication that he sensed, knew that he had the power of the Lord here with him to heal. And it's not a matter of whether or not he had it or not on any given occasion. You all know Philippians chapter 2 verses 6-7, which says that Jesus is in, in his incarnation. "He was in the form of God, but he didn't account equality with God a thing to be grasped," or to want, something to be clutched onto, "But he emptied himself," he let it go, he made himself "He took the form of a servant being born in the likeness of men." Those verses don't teach us that Jesus was divested of his deity during the incarnation, but rather, that he was submitted to the exercise, exercising his divine attributes, according to the will of his Father, completely, according to the will of his Father, all mediated through the Holy Spirit.

In the Incarnation, Jesus walked in perfect, unbroken submission to his father's will. He was led along through continuous sensitivity to the Holy Spirit and, the spirit's leading so when it says that the power of the Lord was with him to heal. Luke is here revealing to us, what we wouldn't know without that written there. He's revealing to us here that Jesus on this particular occasion, sensed the power of the Holy

Spirit, with him to heal and it indicates a readiness on his part. A readiness, we don't know what that was like. It's totally a mystery to us, how the divine nature of Jesus and the human nature of Jesus interacted in one person, united; no separation there.

We don't know what that was like. It's a mystery to us, incomprehensible. We have no idea how he knew, no way to describe the sensation that he had, but Jesus knew, on this occasion that the power of the Lord was with him to heal. And that also meant that Jesus knew if he sensed the power of the Lord with him to heal, well that kind of gave him a clue that there would be an opportunity to perform a healing work.

At some point, he had to be expecting some kind of providential divine interruption into his teaching ministry. He's thinking, when's it gonna come? So there he was, before an attentive crowd, the presence of the religious establishment, heightening the tension there. He's teaching before a packed house, with the power to heal in his hip pocket. He's got a

round chambered, the hammers pulled back, all he needs to do is pull that trigger. All he needed is someone to heal.

After healing somebody this religious delegation, go back wherever they came, Galilee, Judea, Jerusalem, they'd all give a glowing report of unqualified affirmation, unqualified approval. This is the Messiah we've been waiting for, everybody get on board. What would be perfect at this very moment, is to encounter someone who is in desperate need, right? What would really put his power on display is to heal somebody who is beyond the hope of any human doctor, someone who is so completely and so totally disabled, that only the power of the Lord could heal, that would create the most significant impression on these religious leaders.

I say that because that's the way we tend to think of this, that's not the way Jesus thought about this. He had no thought whatsoever of catering to the religious establishment. He didn't intend to perform to the crowd, but note, that's exactly what God provided, nevertheless. Imagine yourself there in the

crowded room, it's, it's hot, it's stuffy, it's packed. You've probably been in a place like that before. It's not comfortable. Jesus is busy teaching, so you don't mind the discomfort. You're paying attention. You're focused, you're dialed in. And all of a sudden you notice there's some activity going on outside, a bit of disruption, a little bit of rustling, as divine providence is sending in a little interruption. A little perfect opportunity for Jesus.

Verse 18, look there. "Behold, some men were bringing on a bed, a man who was paralyzed." We don't know much about the man, actually we know hardly anything at all. But Matthew and Mark use the popular term, *paralytikos*, paralytic. They call him a paralytic, which refers to the symptom rather than, than the condition. That's how people commonly tend to think of these people, they gave them a label, we understand that we give people labels all the time. But Luke, as a physician, he uses more medically precise language here, he notes that the man was paralyzed. And that indicates that the cause of that paralyzed condition is something else.



We don't know what caused the paralysis. Luke doesn't state it, we don't know it, could have been a disease, could have been an accident, it could have been a genetic defect, or whatever. But the point is, this guy here has no mobility whatsoever, he cannot move so his friends have to carry him around on a bed. That's hard work. If any of you have had the privilege of carrying the dead weight of someone who cannot assist you at all, like their unconscious or something like that, you know that you appreciate one, two, or maybe three others to help you heft that load, right?

By the time these guys arrive, they can't find a way into the house. Behold, some men were bringing on a bed a man who was paralyzed and actually, we find out in Mark that there were four of them carrying this bed. They were seeking to bring him in and lay him before Jesus. But verse 19, "Finding no way to bring him in because of the crowd. They went up on the roof, let him down with his bed through the tiles into the midst before Jesus."

Listen, we need to note that part of the reason these guys could not get through the crowd was because the room was filled with all these honored guests. Able bodied guests, Pharisees, law professors, oh, and by the way, they're just sitting there. Why don't you get up and make some room, Why don't you get up and make a hole, let these guys through. But they're taking up a lot of space. And not only that, but no one around them, surrounding them wants to give up their seat. They don't want to make room for the man paralyzed on a bed and four guys coming through.

They don't want to lose their seat. They want to stay really close to these important people. But all credit to these four guys. They're undeterred. They make their way up an outside staircase which led to the roof. Palestinian houses typically had exterior staircases or ladders to provide access to the roof for obvious reasons, there's better air conditioning up there. It's a good place to rest, good place to eat, pray, do whatever, dry laundry. But up they go and not just that, not just them, but up they go hoisting their paralyzed friend up with them.

Again, exhausting work. Before they could execute their little plan to lower this guy through the roof. They had to make some quick modifications to the man's bed. The word for bed in verse 18 is *kline*. And that doesn't refer to a lightweight mat. There's actually another word for that. This word refers to the larger, more comfortable bed, like a more cumbersome and heavier bed, it would keep this guy comfortable laying down and they're hefting that around as they walk through the city, as they come to the door, as they lift him up onto the roof.

But instead of trying to squeeze that whole thing through that small opening in the roof, they needed to reduce the size of that bed. And so that's what we see. Because in verse 19, Luke tells us he was lowered not a *kline* but on a *klinidan* which is the diminutive term, it's now become a little bed. It's become a stretcher. They've chopped that thing up.

So having permanently modified the bed, reducing it to a stretcher, they proceed with removing the tiles off the roof. The tiles were sections of thatch they were cemented together with clay and then laid over cross beams and those sections were

then sealed to keep the rain out. So the men here had to break the seals. And after that, then remove the tiles to lower their friend down into the room.

Again, imagine yourself there picture the scene; you're in the room and all of a sudden, it's already hot and stuffy, you're crowded, you're squeezed together and now dirt and dust is falling from the ceiling. It's starting to choke you. You don't like it. And it's falling on all the people around you, including Jesus. You're watching teaching and it's falling onto Oh, no, look, the Pharisees and the scribes, that's not good. Those guys are dressed in some pretty nice rags. And they're really important people. They're not going to like dirt and stuff falling all around them.

Everyone's choking from the dust or waving dirt and junk out of their faces. And then through the haze, they start to see this stretcher, descending from the opening in the ceiling. It's lowered by four ropes attached at the four corners of the stretcher, bearing the weight of this helpless paralytic. Gotta

give these guys credit, not just for all the work they did, but for excellent aim. How did they do that?

Luke notes, the precision there that he came down into their midst right in front of Jesus, must have been master craftsman here. At this point in the narrative, and there's a bit of a, you need to imagine a bit of a pregnant pause here. Every eye is on Jesus. They're all waiting to see what he's going to do with this poor man who's lying helplessly there in front of him. Based on Jesus' reputation, based on what a number of them have actually seen for themselves, everybody is anticipating another incredible miracle. They can't wait.

So we've seen here in our outline, occasion for influence now this opportunity to display divine healing power. But Jesus, he spotted something else. Point three, he spotted an opening for forgiveness. When you think about this poor man. Imagine about how humiliated he must have felt at this point. He's now become the center of attention. The reason for the disruption, the reason for people's discomfort and choking. And he knows also that he's interrupted the teaching time. And it's not just

anybody teaching, it's the teaching of the best teacher who's ever lived.

He's in front of the most distinguished audience in all of Israel. Most of us, we're all used to being able bodied. But imagine having your mobility taken away. And now you need to rely on other people to carry you around. You can't take care of yourself. You can't go where you want to go, you can't do what you want to do. You're at the mercy of other people. You're at the mercy of their schedule, you're at the mercy of their convenience, you're at the mercy of their goodwill. And now you feel the added embarrassment of interrupting everybody else in town with your needy condition.

My wife and I have ministered in the past to some dear friends who suffered from cerebral palsy, no ability at all to take care of themselves. Physical issues were just the start of it really. Sometimes the greatest struggle for them was the feeling that they always had to rely on others. They always had to inconvenience other people. The, the humiliation they felt at not being able to feed themselves, not being able to take

themselves to the bathroom, not being able to bathe themselves, not being able to put themselves to bed, when they were fed and something dripped from their mouths that couldn't even wipe their chin.

Added to those physical issues with the spiritual struggles that they felt and were tempted with, feelings of vulnerability, embarrassment and sometimes that boiled over into a resentment toward other people who are able bodied, even an anger toward God. "God why do I have to live in this condition?" No doubt these feelings of vulnerability, weakness, helplessness were overwhelming to this poor man.

And as he's lowered through the roof, by his faithful friends into a room of important able-bodied spectators. And a number of the spectators here are Pharisees and scribes and they teach that being able bodied and wealthy is a mark of God's blessing, but being diseased or infirmed or crippled, that's a mark of God's curse; usually because some hidden sin that you, that other people don't know about, God is cursing you and

making you crippled. That was the view that they had spread throughout the entire culture.

Even the disciples asked in John 9, "Lord who sinned this man or his parents that he should be born blind?" Jesus dispelled that and said, Neither, it's so that the power of God might be put on display right now." This poor guy's dangling above everybody. He's being lowered into their midst. And he's being exposed before everybody. He's physically helpless because of his paralysis. But now a new sensation begins to overwhelm him, as he senses his spiritual helplessness as well, because now, he's not just exposed before a roomful of people.

He's not just exposed before the theology that condemns him. He's exposed before a holy person and he being a man full of sin, perhaps the sins of bitterness and resentment that he felt came to mind or worse, the times that he succumbed to the temptation to blame God for his condition to be angry and shake his fist at the Almighty for his crippled condition. You can imagine, guy must have felt so ashamed before a holy person like Jesus Christ, extremely nervous. In fact, he can't even say



anything. So what does Jesus do? Verse 20. He didn't wait for him to ask, what did he say?

When he saw their faith, said, "Man, your sins are forgiven you." I love the initiative of God here, don't you? Aren't you thankful that God takes initiative with us to bring healing, to bring forgiveness, he doesn't wait for us? Sends a spirit to regenerate us, to open our eyes, to give us faith, that we might place it in him and be saved and healed. And Jesus got right to the issue, didn't he? What good are healthy legs if they just walk you through life with an accusing conscience?

So Jesus saw past this presenting problem, and he got right to the heart of the issue with this poor sinner, "Man, your sins are forgiven you." That's the perfect passive used there. That is to say, your sins have been forgiven you. Jesus is just pronouncing an established settled fact here. Jesus gave this man the declaration of God himself, justified, no more sins. And notice it's not sin in the singular, as if Jesus is healing the particular sin that this man may have committed,

that somehow caused his paralysis. That's not what's going on here.

He's not declaring the forgiveness of some sin that led to his paralysis before God or whatever. Jesus says, "Your sins," plural, "are forgiven you." As in, all your sins. Look, this is comprehensive forgiveness. How could Jesus pronounce such comprehensive forgiveness? Again, notice what preceded Jesus' pronouncement, verse 20, "When he saw" What? "Their faith. When he saw their faith." This is the first time the noun faith has been used in Luke's Gospel, the verbal form was used one time earlier, in Luke chapter 1, when Elizabeth told Mary, guess what she said? She said, "Blessed is she who believed what was spoken from the Lord." Same thing here.

Prior to pronouncing the forgiveness of sins, Jesus saw the necessary precondition, faith, he saw the necessary prerequisite, the essential element of justification. He saw saving faith, there is no forgiveness apart from saving faith. We know that from Ephesians 2:8-9. Faith is the gift of God. "By grace, you've been saved through faith. This is not your own

doing. It's the gift of God, not a result of work so that no one may boast."

So we're not saying Jesus forgave the man on his basis of his own works. By the way, it's plural. It's their faith. So he's talking about the faith of all five of those men, the paralytic and all four friends, he saw their faith. He knew they had faith. And it's not just that they did good works by having compassion on a paralyzed man, by interrupting his teaching time, by dropping the guy through the roof. What he saw here is something that only Jesus can see. And what we do see here is that the greatest miracle of all, which is the justification of a guilty sinner, the reconciliation of a vile sinner. That is the greatest miracle Jesus has ever performed.

It's the only miracle that requires a precondition. Jesus saw with keen spiritual insight, with divine perception. He saw the faith of these five men in this paralyzed man, his four faithful friends, he saw what no man could see. According to verse 22, we know that he saw through everything, he saw people's hearts, he saw their minds, he could read their

thoughts, he knew what they were pondering in their hearts. He knew their unfavorable judgments, he knew their suspicions, he knew their criticisms. Jesus also knew their sins. He saw this man sins, his piercing gaze saw through the man's physical needs, to his deepest need for forgiveness, when he saw this man's faith.

Now, Jesus had the perception of a divine person, he had the omniscience of deity. And knowing what his judgment is of this situation, we can actually look back at this man's actions, we can look at the actions of these four faithful friends. And we can see and learn more clearly about what true faith looks like. If we look at it from Jesus' perspective.

So with Jesus judgment in mind, let's kind of consider the actions of these faithful five because they are quite instructive about the nature of genuine faith. It's especially instructive in light of the contrast that they present here with the critical scribes and the Pharisees. So going back to verses 18, and 19, and just not reading everything, but just kind of

having that in your mind. Notice that in the concern of these men, the men of faith, they were willing to work, weren't they?

They were willing to work. Jesus is the only one that they trusted to heal their friend. And so they were willing to do whatever it took to get their friend before Jesus. They carried that heavy, cumbersome bed through the town of Capernaum. All the way to Peter's home and when the crowd was unwilling to let them through, when the presence of the Pharisees and the scribes and the onlookers created a barrier, they went around it. They found another way. Their faith was willing to work and it was undeterred by any obstacles. They kept on looking. They, they looked to seek and they didn't find so they went around, they found another way.

Not only that, but these men of faith, they were relatively unconcerned with propriety and good manners. They weren't too terribly concerned about the really nice clothes that those guys were wearing. They were willing to disrupt. They were even willing to make people uncomfortable. They were relatively unconcerned with offending them. We might put it this

way, that we could say there was no fear of man, as they exercise faith. Not only that, but these men of faith, they were persistent, weren't they? They wouldn't leave until they got what they came for.

I mean, there was no looking back. They say when Hernan Cortes found the New World, and landed his men on the shore, he burned his ships behind them. You know why? Because he was not going back. He wasn't gonna let any of his men rethink, reconsider when they encountered obstacles. Same thing with these guys. They refuse to look back, they cut that paralyzed man's bed up. Reducing it down to size because they knew in faith, he'd no longer be needing it.

Now even though we can't always see true faith on the outside, those are the marks of genuine saving faith, as well. Here are a few points just to write down, four points just quickly. First, true faith works. True faith, if you've really got true faith, your faith works. It's willing to do whatever it takes to seek God and to do his will. It's a striving faith.



It's an active faith. It's not dead, it's not useless. It doesn't just sit there passively. It works.

Second, true faith endures. It's undeterred by obstacles, it perseveres to the very end, even through pain and suffering, even through the severest trials, so true faith works, true faith endures. Third thing, true faith fears God not man. It fears God not man. It's unconcerned with what's socially and culturally acceptable when it comes to pleasing and trusting God. True Faith fears God not man.

The fourth thing, truth faith is both repentant and hopeful. True faith is both repentant and hopeful. When you have true faith, you know you are never going back to the way things were. You're always going to be looking forward to seize the promise of God. It's repentant, turning away from everything that was behind, like Paul pressing forward to what lies ahead.

Just quickly, by way of contrast, notice the contrast of the religious establishment. Where true faith is active and working. The Pharisees, they're just sitting there, critical,

judgmental, where true faith was seeking, pushing forward, drawing near, persisting, the Pharisees are waiting, just waiting for Jesus to impress them. Where true faith had no fear of man, no interest in decorum and propriety the Pharisees are offended at Jesus impropriety, a mere man, forgiving sins.

Where true faith is unwilling to go backwards, unwilling to sacrifice, the Pharisees are willing to leave Jesus behind. They forsook Jesus, they chose instead to hold on to their positions of power, and influence, and affluence. They love the honor of men rather than the honor of God. So when the power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal, on such a significant occasion, with this unparalleled opportunity to influence the influencers, Jesus on opening forgiveness, they ran through it, and Jesus forgave the man.

After all, as we said, what good are healthy legs, a sound body, if the man walks away still plagued with his guilt and his shame? What good is it to walk around on good legs, but with a troubled conscience? After all, this life will come to an end, one day and those legs are gonna walk up to and stand before



their maker. If the sins are not forgiven, the legs won't do any good in a fiery punishment of an eternal hell. Jesus had to start there, didn't he? Started with the greatest need, provided the most profound healing first, and performed the greatest miracle of all.

Let's pray. Dear Lord God, we are humbled before this narrative because though we, most of us have, not have the excuse that this paralyzed man had to grumble, complain, question your goodness, question your wisdom and yet we do that all the time. We sin against your grace against your mercy. We sin against your provision and for far less reason. we have no reason to complain before you. We are like this man, a sinner. We're sinful before you and yet you have been so gracious to forgive.

You've granted us by the Holy Spirit and by regeneration, you've granted us the faith to believe and in believing you and reaching out in faith we turned away from all that this world has to offer, all the temptations and enticements and we hate them. And you've given us a heart to pursue you, to embrace you,



to hold on to you and clutch for dear life, for our salvation. We love you dearly. We're so thankful you've given us the faith to believe. You've helped us to exercise even feeble faith at times, but to exercise our faith, trusting you completely wholly and exclusively.