

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. Luke 5:17 Where I live the New Age has designated certain spots as vortexes. There is no measurable energy of any known kind, but some people claim those spots are power centers. People come to these spots to experience the power or be healed spiritually or physically. When I guided Japanese tourists who wanted to see these locations, I would ask them on the way if they felt anything. They would say they didn't. Finally, when we got to the location of the supposed vortex I would ask them again. Again, they would say they did not. They would inquire about the healing properties. I responded with a question. "If people were really healed here, how many people with illnesses would be crowded around trying to elbow their way onto this ground?" They would think for a moment and then say, "Oh, I see."

Jesus was teaching in Capernaum (Mark 2:1) and people filled the room, the doorway, and crowded outside. Religious leaders had come eighty miles on foot to hear Him. That is what it would look like if someone really had the power to heal (Matthew 4:25ⁱ)!

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, Luke 5:18 Jesus had healed everyone in Capernaum (4:40). Word of this spread quickly all the way to Jerusalem. This paralyzed man was carried by his four friends probably from a town in the region (Mark 2:3). There was no hope for him. Even today we cannot restore severed nerves that result in paralysis. Their only hope for their friend was to bring him to this man they had heard of in Capernaum. They wanted their friend's body healed. God wants much more than that. The body will perish but the soul is forever. Sometimes all we seek is the healing of the body, but there is a much greater affliction within. Years of guilt, ungodly thoughts and behaviors are signs of that inner affliction.

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. Luke 5:19 It was impossible to get the bed in front of Jesus. The crowd would not budge. They all wanted to be near Jesus, some no doubt to be healed and others to hear His words. The roofs of these houses were made of poles covered with palm branches with a layer of clay over it all. The word is translated as tile in our text is from a root word that means clay mixed with water. Mark's account tells us they uncovered or unroofed it (Mark 2:4ⁱⁱ).

Picture Jesus preaching inside when pieces of clay and dried palm leaves started falling from above. There wouldn't have been much room to get out of the way. Then light began to shine through and they could see a face, and then another, and another. People were probably yelling at them to stop. At last the hole was big enough for the bed and it became clear what was happening. The bed was lowered somehow and landed on the ground in front of Jesus.

²⁰ And when he saw their faith, he said, "Man, your sins are forgiven you." Luke 5:20 Jesus looked up and saw the faces of the men who brought the paraplegic. They were expecting, anticipating, and filled with faith (Matthew 9:29ⁱⁱⁱ). Jesus responded to *their* faith in an authoritative way, "Man, your sins are forgiven you!" But still the man lay there. Jesus skipped right over the physical and went to the greatest need (1 Timothy 1:15^{iv}).

Let me give you something to ponder. If you were a paraplegic and Jesus stood before you waiting to hear your request, what would you ask? What do we ask in prayer? It is so often for the physical passing needs instead of our spiritual needs. Jesus responded to the man's greatest need. May God give us eyes to see our real needs: a pure thought life, gratitude, surrender to God's will, a generous spirit, and all the fruits of the Holy Spirit (John 3:3^v)!

²¹ And the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, saying, "Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" Luke 5:21 A murmur ran through the

crowd. "Blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God?" That does make sense. If someone offends me, you can't forgive him for me. I must forgive him. Sin offends God, so only God can forgive sins. By saying he was forgiven, Jesus was declaring Himself to be God. Man calling himself God is blasphemy, unless the man is the sinless Son of God, the Word incarnate (John 1:14^{vi}).

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'?

Luke 5:22,23 Jesus knew what they were thinking and got to the intended teaching point. He asked a teaching question. Is it easier to say a man's sins are forgiven or to say, "Rise and walk"? Neither is easy. It is impossible with man. We don't have the power to forgive sins against God, nor do we have the ability to restore severed nerves. I don't think it is a coincidence that nerve damage is still something we cannot repair. Jesus didn't say which is harder, but which is easier. Man can't do the easiest. What is easy with God is impossible with man (Luke 11:20^{vii}).

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 paralyzed—"I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go home." Luke 5:24 This is the first time in Luke we have seen Jesus use the title, Son of man. Luke will use it twenty-six times. It was both a sign of humility and a title for the Messiah (Daniel 7:13,14^{viii}).

In doing this miracle Jesus showed that He was the One who came to bring forgiveness of sins, the Lamb of God (John 1:29^{ix}). They had already contemplated the question and knew the utter impossibility of either. Now they were faced with a dilemma. The Jews of the day thought that all sickness was due to sin (cf. John 9:2). *'R. Alexandri said in the name of R. Hiyya b. Abba: A sick man does not recover from his sickness until all his sins are forgiven him'* (Nedarim 41a). *Had they been consistent, accordingly they must have accepted the man's forgiveness!* (- Tyndale New Testament Commentaries – Luke). They could believe their eyes and the simple logic in Jesus' question, or they could choose to cling to their unbelief despite the evidence (Matthew 28:17^x).

We are all faced with the same decision. At some time in our lives we see the hand of God intervene in our situation. We know God is reaching out to us and can forgive us. We must decide what we will do. We either face the obvious and welcome the love and mercy of Jesus, or we cling to our unbelief in the face of the evidence before us. The evidence demands a verdict, and each of us is free to come down on one side or the other (Joshua 24:15^{xi}). We stand at the gates of heaven and hell. Our eternal condition hangs on the choice we make in those moments.

²⁵ And immediately he rose up before them and picked up what he had been lying on and went home, glorifying God. Luke 5:25 In an instant nerves, muscles, mental coordination, and balance were all perfectly restored. Even if we could restore a severed nerve it would take weeks if not months before the person could gain strength and learn to walk again. This man could bend down, pick up his mat, and walk through the crowd while praising God. What would you have felt if you had been in that crowded room and seen the miracle after hearing Jesus' question?

²⁶ And amazement seized them all, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, "We have seen extraordinary things today." Luke 5:26 Awestruck! The power of God was there to heal in Jesus, the Son of Man. The impossible happened. And if that can happen, who is this man and what is He teaching us? They saw something beyond what they thought was possible. Not only could the paraplegic walk, but his sins were forgiven by this man, Jesus.

We see it at times in our lives. We can't explain how it happens. We just know God can do anything, and He graciously intervenes with an unexplainable miracle or coincidence. When He does we have the same decision, the crowd had. We will either worship Him or reject Him. But we can't say we didn't know on the day of judgment (Romans 1:20^{xii}). We can explain it away, but our excuses will sound hollow. I've seen extraordinary things and you surely have too, in your own life or that of another. With man it is impossible, but with God all things are possible (Matthew 19:26^{xiii}).

Even if you haven't yet seen such divine intervention, you have read this historical account and are faced with the same question. You know it is impossible, but here is the record. The record was circulated while eye witnesses were still alive. They could have denied it happened and the account would have been rejected. Instead they affirmed it and the record was copied and passed down. And now you know. Jesus is God in the flesh who can forgive sins. He made it possible by paying our sin debt on the cross (1 Peter 2:24^{xiv}).

A word of warning, Capernaum rejected Jesus as Savior (Matthew 11:23^{xv}). A generation later there would be those on each side of the answer living there. Jews would call those Christians living in Capernaum cursed because they chose to believe the evidence. The world will reject us for accepting the evidence (John 15:19-20^{xvi}). Choosing Jesus is to reject a selfish life (1 John 2:15-17^{xvii}). Choosing this self-centeredness is to reject Jesus (Matthew 16:24^{xviii}).

Why am I trying to convince you to believe and follow Jesus? I had a great professor of contemporary rhetoric. She taught us to always look for motivation of the speaker or pollster to discern bias. I have nothing to gain from sharing Christ with you. I don't care which Bible believing church you attend or if you are visiting and return to your hometown. The love of God for you is my motivation. I just want you to know the joy and peace of knowing Jesus as your Savior (1 Peter 1:8,9^{xix}). It will cost you everything, but He already gave everything for you!

²⁷ After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth. And he said to him, "Follow me." ²⁸ And leaving everything, he rose and followed him.

Luke 5:27,28 Luke makes it sound as if Jesus went straight out from demonstrating that He could forgive sins to calling Matthew to be a disciple. Whether it was then or some time after, Luke puts the two accounts together as Jews saw tax collectors as disgusting sinners. The Talmud refers to tax collectors as robbers. They worked for the Roman occupiers and increased their wealth by overtaxing their fellow Jews. **Jesus cannot only forgive the worst of sinners, but He can call them to be ministers to show His amazing grace** (John 1:17^{xx}).

Capernaum was on the Via Maris Roman highway. It also had a port. Commerce over the Via Maris went through this one small town. It was the perfect spot for taxation. The Roman barracks in the town would have made Matthew feel secure against the threat of any Jewish zealots. Jewish tax collectors bid and paid for the estimated taxes out of their own purse and then collected it plus their wages from the people. The people thought of them like they thought of lepers, which gives us a connection to a preceding account (Matthew 9:11^{xxi}).

A rabbi choosing a tax collector for a disciple was unthinkable. As Jesus passed Matthew's collection booth, He gave him the call that rabbis used when selecting disciples, "Follow me!" Matthew must have been stunned. But Matthew was likely thinking about giving up that life long before, perhaps after witnessing the many miracles of healing Jesus performed in Capernaum. While the call caught him by surprise, Matthew was ready, as evidenced by him walking away and leaving his records, the collection purse, and whatever else was used in his business (Luke 14:33^{xxii}). More than likely a Roman guard would have been there and taken it all to his commander. Since Matthew paid in advance, walking away may have meant the people would not have to pay until the next tax season began with a new collector. Matthew had made a once and for all conscious decision to choose Jesus over material gain. If following Jesus did not work out, the fishermen could go back to their trade, but Matthew was unlikely to ever win another bid for collecting taxes having walked away in the middle of the job. He burned his bridges (1 Kings 19:21^{xxiii})!

²⁹ And Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them. Luke 5:29 Levi is another name for Matthew. Having given up everything to follow Jesus, he was not reluctant but instead was jubilant. He threw a retirement party, only it was really a change of career party. Tax collectors only friends were tax collectors or other wealthy "sinners". Jesus and the disciples were there among them. I wonder how the disciples felt. Peter had surely handed over a lot of coins to Matthew over the

years and had probably despised him in the past. Now they are on the same team. They both gave up everything to follow Jesus (Mark 10:28^{xxiv}).

This is a very odd mixture of life styles at this feast. You have the most despised men wining and dining with a rabbi who advocates that one cannot serve God and money (16:13^{xxv}). Matthew had chosen God to be first in his life but had invited his friends who had not yet done so. It seems to me that he was hoping to influence them to make the same kind of decision. Jesus came for all. He could see that the hearts of the tax collectors and Pharisees were really not that different. They had each been bound by sin, one of the worship of money and the other of pride. God does not look on the outward appearance (1 Samuel 16:7^{xxvi}). He sees our hearts and what keeps us from the freedom He has for us in Himself. He meets us right where we are and shows His love for us by inviting us to leave it all and follow Him.

³⁰ *And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"* Luke 5:30 The legalistic judgmental Pharisees wouldn't be caught dead at a table with a tax collector. Their question to the disciples was really a way of denouncing Jesus. They had just seen an incredible miracle of mercy and they still can't understand God's compassion for the lost (19:10^{xxvii}). The question was probably meant to try to get the disciples to desert Jesus. Jesus overheard their thinly veiled attack.

³¹ *And Jesus answered them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick."* ³² *I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.* Luke 5:31,32 Who hears Jesus and His invitation to walk in righteousness? The ones who recognize their true condition. The Scriptures tell us there is none righteous, no not one (Psalm 14:3^{xxviii})! *"The church is the only fellowship in the world where the one requirement for membership is the unworthiness of the candidate."* -Robert Munger Previously in Luke we read that old Simeon in the temple was righteous. We saw how that was only possible by faith in God, not in one's self. In other words, we count on the righteousness of God to redeem us sinners. These Pharisees were counting on their good works (Titus 3:5^{xxix}).

Jesus was not saying they were righteous. He was saying His call is to save sinners. That is why He had to be among us. We are all sin sick, spiritually paralyzed by our fallen nature. The Pharisees failed to see that, and instead emphasized their own "goodness". We all need to repent of our sins and come to Jesus in faith and receive His forgiveness. We can only be righteous when we are in Him (1 Corinthians 1:30^{xxx}).

Our present culture is a mixture of these two sets of sinners. It worships money and thinks itself spiritual. It is prideful in its lust for money. It sees no need to repent for many think they are morally superior just as the Pharisees of Jesus' day. They don't even see their own spiritual paralysis. Perhaps one take away from this passage is to focus our evangelism efforts on those who know they are sinners and to be among them to share the answer we have found in Jesus. At Jesus' direction we can tell them to rise and walk and leave their old life to follow Him.

Jesus did not ignore the Pharisees. He will dine with them as well. We'll see that in chapter 7. He has some harsh words to share with them to help them open their eyes to their true condition. Do you see how desperately we need Him? Do you believe He can forgive sins? Do you understand that you can't be too great a sinner for Him to call you to leave it all behind and follow Him? We stand at the precipice of eternity and each of us must choose whom we will serve. Do you realize how greatly you need the forgiveness only Jesus can offer?

Questions

1 Why were crowds around Jesus so large? 2 Describe the dramatic scene at Peter's home? 3 Why did the people think Jesus was blaspheming? 4 What was Jesus' teaching question? 5 What should we learn from it? 6 Describe Matthew's occupation. 7 What did Jesus say to him? 8 What was his response? 9 What was the Pharisees jab at Jesus? 10 What are we to learn from His answer? 11 How great is your need for Jesus?

ⁱ Matthew 4:25 (ESV)

25 And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.

ⁱⁱ Mark 2:4 (ESV)

4 And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him, and when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay. (removed = uncover, or unroof – used only here)

ⁱⁱⁱ Matthew 9:29 (ESV)

29 Then he touched their eyes, saying, "According to your faith be it done to you."

^{iv} 1 Timothy 1:15 (ESV)

15 The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.

^v John 3:3 (ESV)

3 Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

^{vi} John 1:14 (ESV)

14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

^{vii} Luke 11:20 (ESV)

20 But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

^{viii} Daniel 7:13-14 (ESV)

13 "I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. 14 And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

^{ix} John 1:29 (ESV)

29 The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

^x Matthew 28:17 (ESV)

17 And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted.

^{xi} Joshua 24:15 (ESV)

15 And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."

^{xii} Romans 1:20 (ESV)

20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

^{xiii} Matthew 19:26 (ESV)

26 *But Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."*

^{xiv} 1 Peter 2:24 (ESV)

24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

^{xv} Matthew 11:23 (ESV)

23 And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.

^{xvi} John 15:18-19 (ESV)

18 "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.

19 If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

^{xvii} 1 John 2:15-17 (ESV)

15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

16 For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.

17 And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

^{xviii} Matthew 16:24 (ESV)

24 Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

^{xix} 1 Peter 1:8-9 (ESV)

8 Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory,

9 obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

^{xx} John 3:17 (ESV)

17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

^{xxi} Matthew 9:11 (ESV)

11 And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

^{xxii} Luke 14:33 (ESV)

33 So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

^{xxiii} 1 Kings 19:21 (ESV)

21 And he returned from following him and took the yoke of oxen and sacrificed them and boiled their flesh with the yokes of the oxen and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and went after Elijah and assisted him.

^{xxiv} Mark 10:28 (ESV)

28 Peter began to say to him, "See, we have left everything and followed you."

^{xxv} Luke 16:13 (ESV)

13 No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."

^{xxvi} 1 Samuel 16:7 (ESV)

7 But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart."

^{xxvii} Luke 19:10 (ESV)

10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

^{xxviii} Psalm 14:3 (ESV)

3 They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.

^{xxix} Titus 3:5 (ESV)

5 he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,

^{xxx} 1 Corinthians 1:30 (ESV)

30 And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption,