

*LU5:17 And it came about one day that He was teaching; and there were some Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting there, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem; and the power of the Lord was present for Him to perform healing. 18 And behold, some men were carrying on a bed a man who was paralyzed; and they were trying to bring him in, and to set him down in front of Him. 19 And not finding any way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down through the tiles with his stretcher, right in the center, in front of Jesus. 20 And seeing their faith, He said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven you." 21 And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, "Who is this man who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?" 22 But Jesus, aware of their reasonings, answered and said to them, "Why are you reasoning in your hearts? 23 "Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins have been forgiven you,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'? 24 "But in order that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,"— He said to the paralytic—"I say to you, rise, and take up your stretcher and go home." 25 And at once he rose up before them, and took up what he had been lying on, and went home, glorifying God. 26 And they were all seized with astonishment and began glorifying God; and they were filled with fear, saying, "We have seen remarkable things today."*

This wonderful story is really an extension of last weeks story of the man healed of leprosy. We saw that leprosy is a visual picture outside of what sin does to every person on the inside.

Sin debilitates us in much the same way leprosy debilitates. We might say that with leprosy, the central nervous system is dead. You can't feel anything.

That's what sin does to our souls. We are dead to a spiritual relationship with our creator.

I was listening to a discussion this week on line about the sequence of

salvation. And the most common belief and thought might go something like this; *I was listening to someone teaching the bible, and I had faith to believe which resulted in my salvation.* That's the common sequence.

But biblically, it can be argued and taught that according to Ephesians 2, you were as dead to hearing that message as the guy with leprosy was dead to feel any input from his nervous system. Spiritually dead people do not respond with faith.

*Eph. 2:1 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins,*

*4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ*

*8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God*

According to Paul, the reason you are saved is because God quickened you, made you alive from the dead, and then He supplied the very faith for you to believe.

None of it was caused by your dead spirit. All of it originates with God. He quickens you to life and suddenly, alive, your brain says, this is all true, I have to do this, I have to obey Jesus, and you invite Him to come into your heart and dwell there.

But the initiation to life and response by faith is all done for us, a gift. The very faith to believe is a gift of God. Lepers don't heal themselves and people deadened by sin don't respond to spiritual things.

So these 2 stories go hand in hand. Luke is writing purposely in a sequential discovery. Nazareth shows us the deadness of sin. Our eyes can't see the son of God teaching in our midst.

Capernaum, many are healed, the light begins to dawn. Then the story of the fish and Peter realizes God is in his boat and worships Jesus.

Then we might ask the question, if He is God, will He respond to poor sinners, and the story of the believing leper. *If you are willing, you can make me clean.* And immediately Jesus responds with *I am willing. Be cleansed.*

And leprosy is a visual picture of sin. Can He forgive sin? Luke hopes we're asking. What about the rest of us whose disease isn't as outward as leprosy but who are the spiritual equivalents. Dead in our sin.

And that brings us in Luke's sequence to this story we will consider this morning. Can Jesus do for spiritual lepers what He did for a physical one who asked?

That's really the most important question in the universe. Can He reverse the disease of sin that has separated this planet and its inhabitants from the God who created and loves them?

The guy with leprosy only had to come humbly, begging, asking in humility, believing, and Jesus met him more than half way. He reaches out and touches him. The first human touch that man had known in years. And instantly, he was whole.

Who does that?? Who can touch filth and it becomes pure?? Answer, only someone who can create something perfect out of nothing. Next question: Can He touch me and heal my spiritual leprosy, my sin? Can He make me clean inside my heart. Can He recreate me and heal me from the sin that's eating away at my soul and has made me dead to God? Can He make me new, like the leper?

That's where we are in Luke's purposeful sequence this morning.

*17 And it came about one day that He was teaching; and there were some Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting there, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem; and the power of the Lord was present for Him to perform healing. 18 And behold, some men were carrying on a bed a man who was paralyzed;*

The first thing I want to talk about in Luke's narrative is his introduction to the scene. *And it came about one day . . .*

One of the things I love about God's book is the understatement of it all. It's presented to us as so ordinary. *And it came about one day . . .* What came about one day Luke?

Well, all the scholars, the heads of religious study and belief, the top movers and shakers in Israel have come out of everywhere to be present this day. They are holding court on Jesus.

And this very day 4 men have brought a hopelessly sick man, a paralyzed man to Jesus by carrying him there on his bed which he can't get out of.

It's like a perfect storm of intersecting events. The rulers of religion, the pharisees and scribes, all present, and the broken helpless man and the faith that Jesus can heal him. All at the same place at the same time.

There's a word for this. Providence. God is in control of every molecule in this scene. God causes people and places and all the details necessary for all of the elements of this scene to be present this day, at this moment.

By the way, Satan doesn't have that power. Providence to cause all these elements to align perfectly this day belongs to God alone. What we witness in this story this morning didn't happen accidentally, even

though Luke states it so understated. *And it came about . . .*

Read the entire story of Esther some time. God is never mentioned, and yet His providence in how the events to save the Jews came about is on every page. He is in the background, causing the events that will unfold for His glory. That same providence is behind the intersection of all of these events in Luke's gospel in our story this morning. *And it came about one day . . .*

It came about because God is in control of this day. He has caused the rulers and scholars to be present. He has caused the very illness of the man for His own glory. He has caused the man to have 4 good friends who believe, who carry him to Jesus, the Great Physician.

God has caused it all, He is provident over everything. This has all come together in one place and one time so that Jesus can say the words that Luke will record for us, and 2000 years later, we can see and hear this scene and understand the truth that Jesus provided for us in this event that happened on purpose because God caused all the elements to be in place for it to happen. This is the providence of God at work, for our benefit.

*17 And it came about one day that He was teaching; and there were some Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting there, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem;*

This is our introduction to an adversarial group of people who will ultimately destroy Jesus. Pharisees and teachers of the law.

Pharisees were a sect of religious Jews. They formed after the Jews had returned from their captivity by the Babylonians. And their world view was to be zealous for the law of God by practicing every precept. Experts at empty legalistic religion.

But it devolved into a legalism that didn't bother living out the weightier matters of the law like mercy and justice. They were superficial rule keepers who believed that made them righteous. Practicing legalists.

But like us they believed in a literal view of the words of the law and that it was both divinely inspired revealed truth from God, and that it was binding on people to keep it.

Ultimately they couldn't do that because of indwelling sin, and things devolved into rules made by men, traditions of the elders, that were not inspired and were where they could put on a display of rules keeping that they thought made them very religious.

In any case, they are the top authorities in Israel on all things religious, and news has come of a teacher who doesn't teach like they do, and who also has great power to heal. And it's up to them to go take a look and make a pronouncement about this Jesus.

The self righteous experts have come to observe and critique. They have come to see if Jesus measures up. They're the pinnacle, they have come to see if He is even on the same ladder. Or is He a crackpot. It's up to them. Or so they believed. That's why they're there, to pronounce their judgement on Jesus.

*and the power of the Lord was present for Him to perform healing.*

Now you'll recall that in Nazareth, His home town where He grew up, that power wasn't present. That was a rebuke from God for their unbelief.

But here, the unbelief of these rulers of Israel is different. They come from a position of authority. They are the top men of Israel. They own authority. These are the men who can pronounce Jesus as one of them, or not. In Israel, these are the king makers.

And their unbelief rests in their authority. What they pronounce goes. And God the Father has providentially assembled them, because He wants them to know about real authority, not man made authority. Jesus is full of that real authority, authority that only God has. And power to heal is flowing through Him from God that day.

This is like a showdown. All the man made power of Israel, all the movers and shakers. All the king makers. And they've come to hold court on a challenge to that authority. Multitudes of people are following someone else. That's like a threat to their position. So they've come to see about that. What does this guy have? The common folk think He's a big deal, we'll decide.

And into that situation, again the providence of God is at work. It's like a conference and they're listening to the teacher teaching, but listening from a supposed position of authority. Waiting for Him to say something they don't agree with. Like judges in a courtroom. Listening and waiting.

And right on schedule, God's schedule since He is the choreographer of everything, right in His perfect timing, here comes something ridiculous.

*18 And behold, some men were carrying on a bed a man who was paralyzed; and they were trying to bring him in, and to set him down in front of Him. 19 And not finding any way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down through the tiles with his stretcher, right in the center, in front of Jesus.*

This is audacious. Mark tells us they are in Capernaum in a large house. And there's no room, it's packed. And these four guys have carried their helpless friend, on a pallet, or what we might call a stretcher, they've brought him to Jesus to be healed.

All three synoptic's tell us this tale. But none of them tell us anything about the man himself, except he is paralyzed. He's helpless. But it's pretty audacious what they do.

This helpless man is like the least important person in Israel. A human derelict. Worth nothing, to no one. Except he has four friends, so that's something. But still, compared to the ruling religious class, the men from Jerusalem, the Pharisees and their scribes from every village and town and also Jerusalem, the capitol of their religion, he is the least important man possible for this scenario. Less than nobody.

It would be rather like, the governor and all the senators of Nevada, in the convention center, it's packed, important men doing important work, deciding if Jesus is anybody to worry about, and here comes 4 nobody's trying to get an audience with Jesus.

If you were the paralyzed guy, how would you feel? Your friends have opened up a hole in the ceiling, large enough to lower you down right in the middle of all this importance. It's pretty audacious. And there's not much the paralyzed guy can do about any of it. He's helpless. But put yourself in his place.

Least important guy in the world, helpless, a nuisance to everybody who has to care for you, lowered into a scene where all the heavy hitters are present to see if this Jesus is anybody to worry about. In politics you have to worry about every challenger. That's why they're there.

It's quite a scene. I don't know about you, but if it were me, I'd be shaking in my paralyzed boots. This would not be a fun moment. You can just see this sea of people opening up a space, right in front of Jesus, and the stretcher coming down, and this poor helpless derelict of a human having an audience with Jesus at the worst possible time.

*20 And seeing their faith,* Whose faith?? their faith. This was a

collective faith. It took 5 people to cause this. Four friends to carry him and get him in front of Jesus and the man himself. All we know is what it tells us. Their faith.

*He said, "Friend, This is the physician dealing with his patient. The word is an endearing one in the greek. Son, child, it's a term of endearment. It's a word spoken in love to set the poor guy at ease. Child, son, friend,*

*And Luke leaves something out that Matthew tells us in his account just here. and Jesus seeing their faith said to the paralytic, "Take courage, My son,*

Take courage. And the greek word is telling, we learn a tiny bit more about the scene. The word for take courage isn't the one where you tell someone to take courage and charge into battle. It's the one that means, relax. There's nothing to be afraid of. Relax, it's OK. Everything is OK.

But the next words will reveal the real problem. The root problem that the man needs the physicians comfort about, isn't his paralysis at all. It's a deeper problem that he's upset about. And since Jesus can look inside men's hearts, that's the problem the physician addresses.

Most of the commentators at this juncture will delicately inform you that what has most likely and routinely in that time, caused the palsy is an STD. He is literally paralyzed as a result of sin. Sexual promiscuity and the related diseases would cause this in as little as 6 years.

And that fact has caused him to be ashamed and frightened at the thought of an audience with the person who will ultimately be the judge of every person.

Friend, child, son, relax. Be of good courage. Don't be afraid. And then the most astonishing words for anyone who has the disease we are

all born with; *20 And seeing their faith, He said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven you."*

Let me stop right here and tell you, you've got one job during your stay here on this planet. This tiny blink in eternity. One job. One thing to accomplish. And that is to be delivered from the guilt of your sins.

Before we leave here, only one thing really matters for eternity. We need deliverance from our sins. Our debt of rebellion against our creator. That has to be addressed. Here. Now. After this, the judgement. This lifetime is when we must deal with our debt, our sin.

Before you leave this earth, you need to know that your debt against the Almighty, the Creator, is forgiven.

Here's what's astonishing. That day, all the movers and shakers, all the important men, the rulers, the leaders, the deciders, the king makers, had no concern at all for this. But one little derelict paralyzed guy, did, and Jesus knew it, and because of the faith of him and his friends who brought him, Jesus says, your sins are forgiven.

The poorest guy, just became the richest guy. Even if he had to spend the remaining time on earth on that stretcher, he's the richest guy in the room. Because his debt of sin against his God, is cancelled. Removed. Gone.

But there's more drama. *21 And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, "Who is this man who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?"*

Now, if we didn't have Matthew and Mark's account we might approach this differently just on what Luke just said. But Matthew and Mark both tell us this conversation is in their minds and in their hearts. It wasn't verbal. This is what all of them were thinking in their minds.

And guess what. They are spot on. Their theology is rock solid. They've got it exactly right. God is the only one who could have just said the words Jesus said to this man, and not be a blasphemer.

We keep finding ourselves back in Exodus 33. Moses having a conversation with God. And God pronounces that He will have mercy on who He will have mercy. And He will by no means let the guilty go unpunished. Forgiveness and mercy are solely the prerogative of God alone. I am that I am. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy.

God is the one who gives mercy. Sovereignly to whom He chooses. God is the one who has sovereign authority to forgive sin. These theologians have a good solid grip on Exodus. They are literalists in their interpretation and they have judged the situation properly according to scripture.

*“Who is this man who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?”*

2 possibilities present themselves, only one of which they considered. Either Jesus is a blasphemer, or He is God. They were going with blasphemer.

In their minds, Jesus has infringed on authority that God alone has. To forgive sins. Their accusation is that you have invaded God's prerogative, God's space, and that makes you a blasphemer. God alone forgives sin.

Make no mistake. The Jews ultimately collaborated with the Romans to murder Jesus for one reason. He claimed to be God. And this is where the conflict begins. This is ground zero in the conflict that eventually gets Jesus killed.

They came from all over Israel to listen to His words and see if they can get some dirt on this man that's robbing them of the devotion of the people who they have authority over. Jesus makes it easy for them. He just claimed to be God. He is either a blasphemer worthy of death, or He is who He claims to be.

*22 But Jesus, aware of their reasonings, answered and said to them, "Why are you reasoning in your hearts?"*

I don't suppose it occurred to them that He can read thoughts. He can look inside their hearts and tell them what they have just said in their minds, not out loud. They are blinded by God Himself. No, they didn't recognize that He just told them what they were thinking. Only God can read minds.

*23 "Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins have been forgiven you,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'?"*

Now there's a quandary. He's single handedly driven disease out of an entire territory. And they will never say that didn't happen. But ultimately, they have this challenge. How did it happen?

How does He say to a shriveled up derelict skin and bones man who can't move, get up and walk, and before everyone's eyes shriveled useless limbs take the shape of muscled healthy limbs, strength immediately comes into them, and he stands up, leans over and with muscled arms picks up the stretcher, and walks out of the room, carrying the bed he came in on.

How do you answer that? The obvious answer is that there has to be a power source, right. Where does that power stop? If He can somehow cause shriveled useless derelict limbs to be new and full of life, what can He do inside a man's heart, unseen?

Which is easier. Well the answer is simple. Both are impossible. Unless you are God.

Jesus goes right to the elephant in the room. He has authority over disease. Where does that authority end? And they will need to come up with an answer. And their answer will be, Satan. Satan is His power source. He has a link with Satan. What an unfortunate conclusion. We'll see more of that later in Luke's book. But they're pressed into a corner to answer His question, and that's where it's going to go.

*24 "But in order that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,"*

Those words must have sent a shiver up the spines of those spineless men. Jesus doesn't mince words. You're absolutely correct. Only God can forgive sins. And I have authority on earth to forgive sins. You boys need to add that up. He just claimed to be God the Son, and they have understood every word. Every word.

Here is the problem that all the religions that have re-invented Jesus have. They invent a Jesus that they like better than the biblical Jesus. A great teacher. A prophet. A man sympathetic with social injustices. A righteous important teacher and prophet. Anything and everything short of Deity.

But here is the problem. All of those other, lesser, Jesuses have no authority to forgive sin.

The Mormon's have invented a fantasmagasmical Jesus, much better than the Jesus of the Holy Bible. A much more attractive Jesus. Oh he's very important, this Jesus of theirs, but he isn't part of a Triune God, and he has no power or authority to forgive sins. It's up to you to work your own way to become a god like he did.

LDS prophet Gordon B Hinckley said: *'The traditional Christ of whom they speak is not the Christ of whom I speak.'*

That's just one example, but all of the religions and cults and others that depart from this simple truth that Jesus states here, have no possibility of their sins being forgiven. If Jesus is not God, then He does not have authority on earth to forgive sin, and also, that Jesus is a liar.

*24 "But in order that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,"*

His conversation with the Pharisee's is over. Over. He's finished speaking to them for now. But there's a bit of unfinished business.

*—He said to the paralytic—“I say to you, rise, and take up your stretcher and go home.”*

Stand up on your previously worthless legs, reach down with your previously worthless arms and hands, pick up the stretcher, and enjoy the rest of the day.

I don't think they had pins, but you could have heard one drop if they did. Confrontation with the religious rulers, and a man who not only can walk out of the room, but he can do it, relieved of the sin that would have condemned him. The sin is gone. The disease is gone.

*25 And at once he rose up before them, and took up what he had been lying on, and went home, glorifying God.*

Now the correct response to what just happened would be to fall on your face and ask for *that* forgiveness. This man just proved that He alone has the authority to forgive sins. And that's far more important than any physical miracle He might do.

*26 And they were all seized with astonishment and began glorifying God; and they were filled with fear, saying, "We have seen remarkable things today."*

The greek word translated "remarkable things" is paradoxos. We get our english word intact, paradox. A paradox is something that has proved to be different from what it was normally thought.

We thought this, but the opposite is true. Astonishment and fear is the right response when God is in the room. When God moves beyond the natural realm, we are seized with the fear of our fragile state before an Almighty God.

What we need to hear is the Master, the Great Physician saying, Relax, friend, your sins are forgiven you. Nothing else is as important as that transaction with the God-Man who can do it.