

Authority to Forgive Sins

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[0 : 0 0] This morning as we come to God's Word, we're continuing the story of Jesus as told by Luke. We are in chapter 5, so if you have your Bible, you're welcome to turn there.

And this morning we come to one of my favorite accounts of the great signs that Jesus performed. We're still looking at Jesus' early ministry, and a couple weeks ago we heard about how Jesus began to call his first disciples, and we heard about how he healed a man with a severe skin disease.

This morning we're going to hear about how Jesus healed a paralyzed man. And we're reading together from Luke chapter 5, verse 17.

One day Jesus was teaching, and Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there. They had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem.

And the power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal the sick. Some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus.

[1 : 1 6] So Luke sets the scene for us. Jesus is in the house, and he's teaching. And the house is jam-packed with people. Luke mentions that a good number of Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there listening to Jesus.

Who were the Pharisees? They were a highly influential religious party, or some would call them a movement, among the Jews. And they were especially influential among the common people.

Some of them held positions in the Sanhedrin, which was the Jewish ruling council, though that was largely controlled actually by the Sadducees. The Pharisees were known for their strict observance and adherence to the law of Moses.

And along with that, they also had their own oral tradition, which they saw as authoritative and necessary in order to interpret and imply the scriptures correctly. So they played a significant role in the religious life of the Jews.

They were often ones teaching in the synagogues and giving interpretations of the law. The others, Luke says, were there were the teachers of the law.

[2 : 3 1] Not all teachers of the law were Pharisees. Being a Pharisee was like having a religious affiliation. But a teacher of the law was a profession.

These guys were kind of like lawyers or judges who specialized in matters of religion. They were scholars. They were considered religious experts and authorities on the law.

They taught the law. They gave rulings and judgments about the meaning of the law of Moses and about compliance with it. So Luke wants us to know that these guys were there as Jesus was teaching.

Not only that, but Luke wants us to know that this wasn't just a couple Pharisees and a couple teachers of the law from town. These Pharisees and teachers of the law had come from all over the country.

From every village of Galilee. Galilee was the whole northern region of Israel. And from the southern region of Israel, Judea.

[3 : 35] And they came from Jerusalem, the capital city of Israel as well. So this is no small detail. Jesus is teaching. There's a huge crowd from the religious establishment there.

And so you can already imagine the tension that would have been in the room. To them, who is this guy, Jesus, going around teaching town to town, synagogue to synagogue?

Who does he align with? What authority does he claim to be doing this? So we've got the Pharisees. We've got the teachers of the law there.

Luke mentions that Jesus has the power of God to heal present. And up to this house walk four men carrying a paralyzed man on a mat.

Now Luke doesn't specify the number of men. But Mark in his gospel does. It was four men. And they are carrying their friend on a mat.

[4 : 37] Literally a bed. We don't know exactly what kind of bed this was. Many translations today seem to be moving more towards stretcher. But it wouldn't obviously be the medical kind that we're used to seeing today.

It probably would have been something simple. Maybe a board wrapped in cloth with some handles cut into it. And they're carrying this man who Luke says was paralyzed.

No other details are given about the man's condition. We don't know how long it's been like this for this man. We don't know what was the cause of his paralysis.

At the least it means that he's unable to walk. He's lost the use of his legs. Luke says they tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus.

Literally they were seeking to bring him in. When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd. They went up on the roof.

[5 : 43] And lowered him on his mat through the tiles. Into the middle of the crowd. Right in front of Jesus. So they made a fair effort to get this man into the house.

They were seeking to bring him in. They did not find a way to bring him in through the crowd. You can imagine them trying to get by people like, excuse me, can we come in?

Can you let us through? Perhaps even trying to nudge or push their way in. But they just couldn't get in. Too many people in the way. Perhaps even some were telling them, you know, wait your turn.

We've traveled a long way to be here. As a way of reflecting on this, think about your own home. How many people could you pack into your house before it would become physically impossible for any more to get in?

You can kind of imagine the bodies of people jammed in so tightly that nobody can even move. Somewhere in the house, they could hear Jesus teaching.

[6 : 49] But getting in was impossible. So finally they gave up and they started looking for another way in. Luke says they carried him up to the roof. And lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd.

According to New Testament scholar Daryl Bach, the typical house in Palestine back then had two stories. The roof was the second story.

And steps often went up to the roof right on the outside of the building. They were easily accessible. The roof was usually somewhat flat and about six feet above the ground.

Wooden beams were laid across the top of the stone or mud walls. With a layer of reeds, thorns, and several inches of clay on top of them. So these men go up on the roof.

And then they proceed to open a hole in the roof. Luke describes the man being lowered through the tiles. This wouldn't be like the suspended ceiling tiles that we're used to seeing today.

[7 : 55] Mark in his gospel actually uses the verb dig. With reference to how they opened the hole. So probably they were removing a chunk of the section of clay.

So that they could lower him down. Imagine this from the perspective of the people inside. Here they are listening to Jesus teach. All of a sudden you hear the sound of footsteps on the roof.

And voices. And then the sound of digging. And then you see some material from the roof begin to crumble down. We don't know what was happening in all those moments.

Jesus probably just went on teaching. Until finally a whole section all of a sudden is opened up. And a head appears looking down into the room. And the daylight behind. What were they thinking?

Wow. Those guys really want to hear Jesus. But that's a little extreme. They're doing damage to the roof. And then you can imagine the look on their faces.

[9 : 03] As they see this bed being lowered through the hole. With a guy lying on top of it. They lower him right down in front of Jesus.

What an entrance. And isn't this the moment that many of the Pharisees. And the teachers of the law have been waiting for. They want to see Jesus in action.

They want to see a miracle. And here's a man who's not just sick. But paralyzed. Just come through the roof. What's Jesus going to do? Will he heal the man?

Right in front of them? When Jesus saw their faith. He said. Friend. Your sins are forgiven.

Let's not miss what Jesus saw from the men. Including the paralyzed man himself. He saw their faith. How did he see their faith?

[10 : 07] Jesus saw it in their actions. They proved that they truly believed. That Jesus was able to heal their friend.

By this extreme measure. Of digging through the roof. And lowering him down. To Jesus. You wouldn't go to this length. Unless you were certain.

Unless you really believe. The news about Jesus. That's been spreading. That he has the power. To heal. And this is a health condition. That's quite serious.

Like inability to walk. Unable to use his legs. Think about all the doctors. This man may have seen in his life.

And yet the trouble. That it took them to get this man to Jesus. Shows just how sincerely. They believed. In Jesus. When Jesus saw their faith.

[11 : 04] He said. Friend. Friend. Your sins are forgiven. I love this. These are not the words. We're expecting to hear.

Out of Jesus mouth. In this moment. This man has come. For physical healing. He has real faith. That Jesus can do it. And Jesus tells him.

That his sins. Are forgiven. The Pharisees. And the teachers of the law. Began thinking to themselves. Who is this fellow.

Who speaks blasphemy. Who can forgive sins. But God alone. So. That statement of Jesus.

Bothered the Pharisees. It bothered the teachers of the law. They're thinking. Your sins are forgiven. Who are you. Jesus. To say such a thing.

[12 : 02] Who do you think you are. And they're right about one thing. They're right. That sins. By definition.

Are not just the stuff. That we do against one another. They are the wrongs. That we do against God. And they are right. That only God.

Can forgive sins. If our sins are against him. Then only he can. Grant us forgiveness. That's true. They're right about that. And ordinarily.

If this was anybody else. Saying this. Your sins are forgiven. They would be right. This would be a blasphemous statement. We know this.

No ordinary man. Has the authority. Or the ability. To get people off the hook with God. For the wrongs that they have done. They see Jesus as being.

[13 : 01] An ordinary man. And so in their minds. They're beginning to charge him. With blasphemy. You can't just tell this man. That his sins are forgiven.

Who do you think you are? Only God can do that. Are you claiming to be God? Jesus knew what they were thinking.

And asked. Why are you thinking these things. In your hearts. Which is easier. To say. Your sins are forgiven. Or to say. Get up and walk. So Jesus challenges.

The very thoughts of their hearts. And he does it with this question. Which is easier. To say. Your sins are forgiven. Or to say.

[13 : 57] Get up. And walk. Imagine you're one of the people. Right there in the room. What's your answer? Which one is easier?

How would you answer the question? How easy is it to say to someone. Your sins are forgiven.

Well actually. It's pretty easy to say it to someone. Anybody could say it. But to say it. And have it be true. That's a whole nother matter.

Anybody. Could say. Your sins are forgiven. But only God. Can actually. Grant forgiveness. Or truly. Declare someone's sins.

Forgiven. What about the second one? How easy is it to say. Get up and walk. Well. As with the first. I mean. Again. Anybody. Could say it.

[15 : 02] But the words. Would be pretty empty. And worthless. Unless the one. Speaking those words. Actually had the power. To heal. People. So both of those things.

Are easy to say. But neither of these things. Can actually be done. By anybody. But God. And I think this is the first thing.

Jesus wants us to see here. Not just anybody. Can do. Either of these things. These are both things. Only God can do. To forgive sins.

And to heal. This paralyzed man. But now. Think about. How you might answer this. If you were one of the Pharisees. And you were quite skeptical. Of Jesus. Which of these is easier?

You might answer. Not based on. Which is actually easier. Or harder. But which is easier. To fake. Probably the easier one.

[16 : 02] From a human standpoint. Would be to say. Your sins are forgiven. Your sins are forgiven. Because there's no way. To verify that. Like Jesus.

You could say. Your sins are forgiven. But how do we know. That that's actually true? How do we know. That God has actually. Forgiven this man. Of his sins? What about the need.

For a sacrifice? What about. I mean. There's all kinds of things. They could say. Get up and walk though. On the other hand. That would. They would be able. To verify. So in a sense.

Maybe that would be. The harder one. To fake. Harder for a mere man. To do. Or at least. To prove. That he did. It's a truly. Brilliant question. That Jesus asked them.

All that day. Which is easier. To say. Your sins are forgiven. Or to say. Get up and walk. Most of us.

[17 : 02] Would probably say. That telling a paralyzed man. To get up and walk. And it actually happening. Is harder. Or if not. That at least. Both. Are equally impossible.

For anybody. But God. Jesus continues. With this. Which is easier. To say. Your sins are forgiven. Or to say. Get up and walk.

But I want you. To know. That the son of man. Has authority. On earth. To forgive. Sins. So he said. To the paralyzed man.

I tell you. Get up. Take your mat. And go home. Immediately. He stood up. In front of them. Took what he'd been lying.

On. And went home. Praising God. Everyone was amazed. And gave praise to God. They were filled with awe. And said.

[17 : 59] We have seen. Remarkable things today. So Jesus heals. The paralyzed man. This is no surprise. We knew that was coming.

This is the news. That's been traveling. Around the whole nation. Jesus has the power. To heal. And that's. Exactly. What Jesus does. Notice. Just for a second. How he heals.

The man. He commands. The paralyzed man. To get up. Take his mat. And go home. That's it. He speaks to him.

And somewhere between. Jesus finishing. This imperative. And the man hearing it. This man goes from. Being crippled. To being able to walk. That's truly amazing.

What was causing. The paralysis. In the man's body. Think about again. How many doctors. This man may have seen. About his condition. Was there a problem. In his nervous system.

[18 : 58] Had he sustained. A spinal injury. Were his legs malformed. We don't know. Exactly why. He was paralyzed. But whatever it was. The man went from. Having this major problem.

In his body. To being fully healed. With muscles. Strengthened enough. To walk. In an instant. Only the power of God.

Can do this. Jesus speaks. With the very power. Of God. But notice the way. That Jesus introduces.

This miraculous healing. It's with these. Words. But I want you to know. That the son of man. Has authority on earth.

To forgive sins. And so he said. Get up. Take your mat. And go home. Jesus wants us. To understand. More. From this miracle.

[19 : 55] The miracle. Is done. To prove something. Other than just. The power of God. To heal. It's done. To prove. That Jesus. The son of man. Has. The very authority.

Of God. To forgive sins. Think back. To the question. Jesus asked. Which is easier. Let's say for a moment.

That our answer. To that question was. Well it's easier. To say your sins. Are forgiven. Because nobody. Can verify that. Let's say that. That was our answer. The harder thing.

Then would be. To say. Get up and walk. And have it actually happen. So Jesus. Then says. And does. The harder thing. To prove. That he can do. The easier thing. Or we might see it.

A different way. We might see it. That both of these things. Are equally. Hard. Both are things. That only God can do. Doing the healing. That would have.

[20 : 55] Very visible. And tangible. Results. While doing. The forgiving. Actual forgiving. Would have. Invisible. Spiritual results. Both are things.

That only God can do. Jesus does the visible. And tangible thing. To prove. That he can do. The invisible. Spiritual thing.

The work of forgiving. In other words. This is a miracle. That comes with a message. It's like Jesus is saying. I am here.

I have come to give you. What you most deeply. Need. More than physical healing. You need forgiveness. Of your sins. And I want you all.

To know. That I have. The authority. On earth. To do that. For you. As we think. Through the many. Miracles of Jesus. Then later.

[21 : 55] The miracles. Of the apostles. We may come. At some point. To ask the question. Why don't followers. Of Jesus. Routinely. Perform miracles. Like this today. And this is a big question.

We have different denominations. Of churches. Over this question. At some point. We have to ask this question. And it leads us.

To that other question. Of what is the purpose. Of the miracles. That may sound like a strange question. Perhaps. You know. We've thought the answer is obvious.

Well these people are sick. They're injured. They're disabled. They're in need. And Jesus is just full of compassion. And love. And power. And so he healed them. Right? Well this is certainly true.

All of Jesus healings. Were acts of compassion. And love. But is that it? I would suggest to you. Based on this passage.

[22 : 52] And others. That in addition to that. There was a greater. Overarching purpose. To the miracles. Jesus did. Look at John's gospel. For a moment. Towards the end.

John chapter 20. Verse 30. John writes. John refers to the miracles of Jesus.

In his account. As signs. And I find that word so helpful. What are the purpose of signs? Think of a road sign. A sign is there to tell us.

About something beyond itself. John in his gospel. States it pretty clearly. These signs that I've written. Here in my account. I've put them in there.

So that you may believe. That you may come to that conclusion. That Jesus is the Messiah. The Son of God. That's the truth. That the signs. That the miracles of Jesus.

[24 : 05] Point to. Peter will go on. To make a similar point. In his first sermon. Recorded by Luke. In the book of Acts. This is Acts chapter 2. Verse 22. Peter will say.

That Jesus was accredited. By God. To you. By miracles. Wonders. And signs. Which God did among you. Through him.

In other words. The miracles. The things. Done by God. Through Jesus. Certified. And authenticated. Jesus. This was God's design.

In the miracles. To authenticate. His. Man. And so. We're meant to think this way. And when Jesus. Does this miracle.

Healing this man. Who is paralyzed. What does it point to? What is it a sign of? And here Jesus. Couldn't make it any clearer. In the way that he approaches. This whole thing. Right off the bat.

[25 : 04] Your sins are forgiven. Which is easier. To say. To say. Your sins are forgiven. Or to heal. Even the statement he makes.

Linking the two. I want you to know. That the son of man. Has authority on earth. To forgive sins. That's the conclusion.

That he wants us to come to. From this miracle. That's what Jesus wants us to know. And understand from it. Not just to wonder.

Not just to be in awe. That God could heal a paralyzed man. But the knowledge. That forgiveness. Of sins. Can be had. Through him. Through Jesus.

Now there's a lot more reflection. That we could do here. If you're new to all this. Or if you haven't heard this before. You still might be wondering. Well how can Jesus. A man. Have the authority to do.

[26 : 06] What only God can. That's a big question. And we don't have time. To fully dig into it. This morning. The short answer. Is that Jesus. Isn't just a man.

As we discover. In the scriptures. In a mysterious way. That's beyond our understanding. He is both. Man. And God. At the same time.

God. And so he does have authority. To do. What only God can. Because he himself. Is God.

Who has come down. In human flesh. To live among us. Another angle. That we could look at this. In both John's gospel. And Luke's gospel.

There's an emphasis. On how Jesus. Is the son. Of God. And God is father. God is son. God is holy spirit. Again.

[27 : 01] It's mysterious. And we don't fully understand it. But God is three persons. And yet. One God. And we see this truth. Come out in the gospels.

Especially Luke and John. About how Jesus. As the son. Of the father. Is the ultimate representative. Of his father.

On earth. Doing. What the father wills. Saying. The very words. That the father has. To say to us. And so.

This authority. To forgive sins. Falls in line with that. Jesus. Is the. The one and only. Son of God. He is the only one. Who has authority. From his father. To grant.

Forgiveness. He can do this. Because of his unique. Relationship. With the father. Father. Maybe you remember those words. He said.

[27 : 57] Which John. Recorded in his gospel. I and the father. Are one. Said Jesus. It's good for us. To reflect on this. That's the effect.

That the miracle. Had on people that day. It caused them. To ask the question. Well who is this man then? Who is he? He declares people. Forgiven of their sins. And then he.

Exercises the very power. Of God. To back it up. This is the conclusion. We're meant to come to. Through all this. Jesus is more.

Than just a man. Who lived long ago. He was. And is. God. He was. And is. The God man. He. He was. And is.

The son. Of God. He was sent. From heaven. To save us. He was sent. From heaven. To give us something. That we desperately. Needed. And could not.

[28 : 54] Provide. For ourselves. Forgiveness. Of sins. There's something. That we need. More. Than just.

Physical healing. Even if the most. Well known. Thing about us. Was a. Disability. Think about this. There's something. We need more. Than physical healing.

We need God's forgiveness. For our sins. And the good news of Jesus. Is that we can have that. By coming to him. With faith.

Just like these men did. Just like the man on the mat. Had. God. The miracles of Jesus. Are great. But the message of grace.

Is greater. And so I want to ask you. What about you? Have you come.

[29 : 54] To faith. In Jesus. Have you. Have you. Have you. Looked to him. For that thing. That your soul.

Most desperately needs. Forgiveness. Of your sins. Have you. Confessed your sins. To him. Have you.

Asked. For his. For his. For his. If Jesus. Had done this miracle. Today. In this very room.

And was standing up here. Right now. Would you come up. To him. And ask. For forgiveness. Of your sins. If you haven't done this.

I want to urge you. Come to Jesus. Today. Confess. Your sins. Today. Ask. For his forgiveness. Today. Find. Life.

[30 : 52] And joy. And peace. With God. Today. There's nothing. That matters. More than this. The last chapter. Of our world. Is coming. Time.

Will soon be up. And this is. The most important thing. Let's pray. Father in heaven. Father in heaven.

Thank you for. Allowing us to see. What happened that day. When your son. Made that. Paralyzed man. To walk again. But I pray that we would see beyond it.

I pray that we would see. The greater reality. That every single one of us. In this room. Would know. That you have authority. Jesus.

To forgive. Us. Our sins. And I pray that you would work. And move in our hearts. That we would come. And receive that gift. And ask for that gift.

[31 : 52] If we haven't. God. I pray that you would move. In our hearts. That we would. Share that news. With others. It is the most important thing.

You've told us. Give us courage. Give us boldness. We thank you. For the amazing grace. That wipes our slate. Completely clean.

Every wrong that we've done. It's awesome. Thank you Lord Jesus. Amen.