

Jesus' Public And Private Life

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[0 : 00] Luke chapter 5 from verse 12 through 16, Jesus' public and private life. Heavenly Father, we bow in your presence. May your word be our rule, your spirit our teacher, and your greater glory our supreme concern, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Amen. By any measure, integrity in our society is in very short supply. There is a marked difference between what we are in private and what we are in public.

Integrity or consistency and transparency, it's in such short supply, especially in politics. While the nation was in strict lockdown and dying care home residents were denied access to their loved ones, it would seem that senior government officials partied away.

But of course, it's easy to point the finger at Boris Johnson and his cronies. What about us as Christians? Are our lives marked by integrity, by consistency and transparency?

That we are in public the same as who we are in private. That with the exception of the pajamas we wear at home, we are the same at work and in church.

[1 : 30] As Christians, we are called to be people of integrity. The gospel of God's grace and the cross of Jesus Christ changes everything about us, both our public and private lives.

Both who we are before other people and who we are behind closed doors. There is nothing as off-putting to the world as a lack of integrity in politicians.

There is nothing as off-putting to the world as a lack of integrity in Christians. Think of the scandals concerning high-profile Christian leaders.

Almost always men who project godliness and charisma in public, but whose private lives are anything but. By contrast, a Christian who possesses integrity attracts others to the gospel.

Now, these verses in Luke 5 demonstrate the integrity of Jesus. That what he was before other people was who he was behind closed doors.

[2 : 42] They were the same. He was devoted to God in private and in public. The humble bathing of his public character was shaped by the humble beauty of his private piety.

His heart was shaped by compassion for the suffering. These weren't platitudes that he gained to get votes. They were the genuine passion of his grace-filled love.

Whatever else he was, and he was much more than that. He was a man of absolute integrity. Power, passion, popularity, and prayer.

Power, passion, popularity, and prayer. These four themes blend together in forming the most fascinating character in all of human history.

And leading on from them, it doesn't really surprise you to see him like he is in this passage, dying on a Roman cross to take away our sins and give us eternal life.

[3 : 55] Do you today want to be a person of integrity? It is not enough to follow Jesus' example because try as hard as we might.

We will all fail miserably. We must also put our faith in him as Lord and let him change us from the inside out. So first of all then, power, power.

From the last few weeks in Luke's gospel, we'll have seen that Jesus possesses great power. A power he never uses for his own benefit, but for the good of the sick, the oppressed, the downtrodden.

He came to preach good news to the poor. And now in this passage, he again uses his power to loose a prisoner's chains and to set him free.

A man full of leprosy, we read, meets Jesus in one of the cities of Galilee. This man wasn't in the first stages of this illness he was riddled through.

[5 : 06] As well as being physically disabled and in great pain, leprosy alienated him from the rest of society. During the COVID pandemic, many healthy people were so terrified of catching the virus that they'd run a mile rather than go anywhere near someone who was suffering from COVID.

What was true for us during our recent pandemic was true for everyone when it came to leprosy in Jesus' day. Everyone was terrified of them just in case they too contracted leprosy.

Lepers were confined to a life of solitude, or if they did have company, it was confined to the company of other dying sufferers. In the world of the day, there was no cure for it.

And here in Luke 5.12, we find one of these poor lepers approaching Jesus. This is the amazing truth about Jesus. He attracts the outcasts of society.

Would that be said about us as the church that bears the name of Jesus that we attracted the outcasts? Would that those who don't fit in with today's society, would that they found the Christian church less judgmental and more attractive?

[6 : 33] Well, this man came to Jesus and he fell on his face and he begged him saying, Lord, if you're willing, you can make me clean. And we know the story. Jesus stretched out his hand and touched the man.

He was probably the first person to have touched this man since the day he began to exhibit the symptoms of leprosy.

No one touches a leper, but Jesus touched him. Never underestimate the power of Jesus' touch. Never underestimate the power of touch, full stop, but Jesus' touch, especially, especially when accompanied by the power of Jesus' word.

Having touched the man, Jesus said, I am willing. Be clean. And we read immediately the leprosy left him. What years of medicine could not do, Jesus achieved with a touch and with a word.

Now, there are many things we can say about this, but what I want to point out is the supreme power of Jesus. Leprosy was incurable and terminal, but with a touch and a word, Jesus lifted the curse on this man's life and made him clean.

[7 : 53] We may talk about our leaders being the most powerful men and women in the world, but the power of Jesus is of another order altogether. Over the centuries, rationalists have tried to explain away Jesus' miracles by attributing them to natural causes.

But a miracle like this cannot be attributed to any natural cause. But with a word and with a touch, this man was healed. This is the power of God at work in the life of Jesus of Nazareth.

He came to proclaim liberty to captives like this poor leper whose life had been destroyed by this suffering. He proclaimed it with the word because it's by the word He heals this man.

That word which brought our universe into existence is now unleashed not in building new solar systems, not in setting the boundaries of the oceans, but in releasing an insignificant nobody from the chains of His misery in an unnamed first century Galilean nowhere.

We'll always be unlocking the secrets of the universe. We'll always be standing on the shoulders of scientific giants like Isaac Newton and Stephen Hawking to piece together what God did in creating all things.

[9 : 22] And yet, that same power which created the universe worked in a man called Jesus Christ 2,000 years ago in the ancient Middle East. And he's working Jesus, His spirit-filled, divine power in the life of human weakness.

He overcomes the order of things and reverses the leper's curse. See the great power of Jesus. For all that we worship Him, for all that we love Him, we worship Him for His love and His might.

We depend upon Him to work that same spirit-filled divine power in our beaten down lives. You see, Jesus' power is drawn by our weakness but repelled by our strength.

Consider the great power of Jesus greater than that which is wielded by any human leader, greater than the nuclear forces which hold atoms together, greater than the power of the tides or the great deeps of the oceans.

This is the power of Jesus. And so again I say, the power of Jesus is attracted to our weakness but repelled by our strength.

[10 : 41] If this is true, and from this passage in Luke's Gospel, we see that it is true, then the perfect position we need to be in is where the leper was, falling at the face of Jesus, begging Him for strength.

The problem for many of us, especially in the West, is that we think we're stronger than we really are, that we don't need the power of Jesus to work in our lives, cleansing us from sin.

healing us from the misery which we all suffer. I'm speaking here not to those among us who know that they are weak and need the help only Jesus to give.

I'm speaking to those among us who don't give their personal weakness a second thought. who rather than being dependent upon Christ are characterized by human sufficiency.

We stand in front of the mirror in the morning and say, I can do this. That is the polar opposite of the Christian principle. And likewise, as a church, we must recognize that though we may plan, unless the presence of Jesus is with us to work in miraculous, supernatural mightiness, we shall achieve nothing of any real worth.

[12 : 15] This is a plea to us all to recognize that not one of us is stronger than this helpless leper, but that our strength is of Christ and therefore it is upon Him we must depend and to Him we must pray for blessing, for strength, and for daily help.

Power. Second, passion. Passion. As you go through the Gospels, you're constantly amazed at the love of Jesus for common people.

There are times when we read of His compassion, at other times His love, but the underlying theme is this deep concern for a suffering humanity.

And He didn't look five, 12 through 16, we learn it in a number of ways. The very fact that Jesus would have anything to do with a leper is a mark of His love for the man.

The fact that He touched the man. The deeper fact that Jesus healed him shows an even greater love. But perhaps we see it most prominently in His interaction with the man after the healing.

[13 : 28] Jesus tells him, go and show yourself to the priest and make an offering for your cleansing. Let's read this in verse 14. Make an offering for your cleansing as Moses commanded for a proof to them.

Now, there are many reasons Jesus may have said this, not the least of which is Jesus' personal concern to keep the Mosaic law and to leave no stone unturned in His pursuit of personal righteousness.

However, the ultimate reason, it seems to me, is for the holistic well-being, the holistic well-being of this man, which is always Jesus' ultimate reason for saying or doing anything.

Think about it. This man was a leper. His disease was advanced. He had been a leper for many, many years. In that society, lepers either lived by themselves or in closely guarded leper colonies.

For many years, he had lived apart from society. Perhaps he'd not seen his wife or children all that time. He had not been able to work.

[14 : 34] He had not enjoyed any level of normal friendship. He lived with death. He'd been an outcast from society, locked away in the prison of leprosy in full view of everyone.

Well, this man's cleansing from leprosy was one thing. His integration back into society was quite another.

If he went back well, however clean, people would still be suspicious that he harbored leprosy perhaps in a part of his body that they couldn't see because it was covered with clothes.

And so they'd still stand at a distance from him. And so Jesus, having healed this man's physical disease, now turns to the man's social disease.

He commands him to get from the highest authorities in the land the ancient equivalent of a doctor's fit-to-work certificate. The advantage of this is the man can return to normal life.

[15 : 40] He can embrace his wife and his children. He can get back to the work he once enjoyed and earn a regular living. He could return to the friendships that he once had.

He could get back to a regular pattern of synagogue worship. He could be a normal man again. The whole sordid affair of his leprosy could be a dim and distant memory.

So why did Jesus command this man, this helpless, weak outcast, to go and show himself to the priest? Ultimately, it was the passion of Jesus.

Because you see, he loves the whole person, body and soul, mind and heart. Don't you know that there's no one, just as there's no one more powerful than Jesus, there's no one more passionate than Jesus for the human race.

If you have ever dipped into the writings of the theologian Karl Barth, you'll know that he was a very deep thinker. His writings make heavy reading, with it sometimes taking even me a day to digest a single paragraph.

[16 : 57] And his writings extend to many thousands of pages. There's much to admire about Karl Barth without agreeing with everything, but Barth was once asked, this great theologian, what was the most profound theological truth he had ever encountered?

Never mind double predestination, not any other deep philosophical discussion, he quickly responded to his questioner in these words, Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.

The love of Jesus for Karl Barth filled Karl Barth's mind and heart with love, joy, and peace.

Have you made Barth's discovery yet? Let me tell you, it is the discovery of a lifetime. Forget predestination, forget all these things.

The most profound truth in all of history is this, Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.

[18 : 11] Despite all I am and all the rotten things I say and all the unkind things I do, Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.

Despite how little I love myself and how others might look down upon me, Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so. He loves me with all the intensity of his divine heart, every ventricular atrium pumping forth a deeper love than the last.

Think of the great power brokers of our world. Do they love you? to Elon Musk, are you any more than a marketing algorithm, are you any more than a name used by a marketing algorithm to harvest your personal details?

To them, you're a consumer, you're not a person, but Jesus, so much more powerful than them all, is also so much more passionate.

If I can convince you of this fact that Jesus loves you enough to have all the hairs on your head counted, if I can convince you that Jesus loves you so much that even when you don't love yourself, his heart still beats with love for you, then if that's all you've learned from my entire ministry, then I will have more than met my ambitions.

[19 : 47] Jesus loves you entirely and powerfully as he loved this leper in Luke 5. Thirdly, popularity.

Popularity, verse 15. Popularity. For reasons we don't have time to go into, Jesus doesn't want to keep news of his presence, doesn't want news of his presence to be widely known, but it cannot be kept a secret.

We read, but even now, more the report went out about him going abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities.

Jesus was never more popular than he was at this moment. The Jesus around whom vast crowds gathered, vast crowds. They hung upon every word he spoke, and they begged him to heal the sick among them.

Jesus had the kind of popularity that our great politicians could only dream about. And yet, what kind of popularity is it when, look at verse 15, the great crowds who have gathered around him are those who are physically, mentally, and socially disabled, who are the weakest specimens of society?

[21 : 06] They're not the celebrities who live in big houses in the suburbs of Jerusalem. the paparazzi do not follow them around waiting for that million dollar picture which adorns the front pages of the world's newspapers the next day.

They're not the rich or famous, they're not the wise or wealthy, they are what's called in another place in the gospels, the common man. This is the popularity of Jesus among the common man.

Luke wrote this gospel to an early church, a church filled with different kinds of people. We've already understood that one of his burdens was to reinforce Jesus' passion for the Gentiles, that non-Jews be treated as absolute equals in the kingdom of God.

But now we see another. Given that the early church was filled with all different kinds of people, the able-bodied, the rich, and the socially affluent, are to treat the disabled, poor, and socially outcast Christians as absolute equals.

There must neither be discrimination on the basis of ethnic background, social class, wealth, or health.

[22 : 30] The church is one, young and old, rich and poor, male and female, abled, bodied, disabled, because every member owes his or her inclusion entirely down to the grace of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Whether rich or poor, Jew or Gentile, able-bodied, or disabled, we all came to Jesus as begging sinners, as spiritual lepers, as helpless weaklings. Remember what I said earlier?

The power of Jesus is attracted to our weakness. There was no other way for us to be saved than by an admission of our total need of his mercy.

I wonder whether we here in Glasgow City and Partick are prepared for this kind of popularity, that those who shall gather here in this church to hear the word of God being preached Lord's Day by Lord's Day shall not be the great and good of Partick and Glasgow.

They shall be the poor and disadvantaged, the socially awkward and the weird, the disabled, those who can give us nothing in return except their problems.

[23 : 48] I'm raising this as a challenge to us as a church, but as an encouragement to each one of us as individuals. every one of us comes to Jesus as helpless people who needs nothing else than the gospel.

With great love, Jesus' power is drawn to our weakness. We've got to be empty of ourselves if Jesus can fill us with himself. Luke's mentor, the Apostle Paul, heard the words of Jesus saying to him, my grace is sufficient for you, my power is made perfect in your weakness.

Christian integrity demands that we are in public the same as what we are in private, which means that it is of first importance that we do not project an image of ourselves as Christians or the church as a Christian church of self-sufficiency.

We are neither self-sufficient in private nor should we self-sufficient in public. None of us like to be thought of as fragile, vulnerable, weak, and helpless.

But if that is what we are before God, then perhaps that's what we need to be more toward each other. Popularity. And then lastly, prayer.

[25 : 27] Talking about Jesus' public and private life, prayer. Thus, far in our sermon, we have examined Jesus' public life under the headings of power, passion, and popularity. But what of his private life?

Just as the source of the Nile River is found in inland Lake Victoria, so the source of Jesus' power, passion, and popularity is found in his private life.

This is where we see the absolute integrity of Jesus, committed to God in public, committed to God in private. Cut him through and you'll find his blood running with commitment to God.

And so we read in verse 16, he would withdraw to desolate places and pray. His public power, his public passion, his public popularity, find their source, here in his private prayer.

He was never alone when he prayed, because he was always with his heavenly father. If you like, we can call these times of prayer time out with his father.

[26 : 34] This is where he told his heavenly father everything. He brought all the events of his public life to God in prayer. He told his father all about this leper and about how he made this leper clean.

He prayed through them all, receiving new power and passion from his father. Look for Jesus at these times. Where is he? Where is Jesus? You might ask the disciples.

They'll say, he's out there in the wilderness. He's sitting under the shade of a tree. Or there he is walking by himself along the lake of Galilee. And then you go and you listen to him and you hear him under his breath expressing his deep passion for the people God has called him to serve.

In private he speaks to God. In public he speaks for God. Here then we have the not so secret secret of Jesus' integrity. Here is a man whose private life was characterized by prayer.

This too is the secret to our pursuit of integrity in the Christian life. Of consistency and transparency. Of being the same Saturday night as we are Sunday morning.

[27 : 51] Devoting ourselves in private to God just like we devote ourselves in public to God. We've heard it said of course that the private life of a politician has no influence upon his public life.

He can be an immoral beast and a bully of a man in private but as long as he's a good politician that's okay. Well that is not and cannot ever be the way it is for a Christian.

The health of our public profession of Christ is dependent upon the health of our public devotion to Christ. Glasgow City Free Church used to have as one of its mottos, clever motto, it's what's on the inside that counts.

The secret of Jesus' dynamic public life is found in Jesus' devoted private life. Let me say that again for it really is at the heart everything God is saying to us through this passage in Luke 5.

The secret of Jesus' dynamic public life is found in Jesus' devoted private life. It's because of who Jesus was on the inside that he could be who he was on the outside.

[29 : 03] Little aside here, one of my friends was the driver for the great American evangelist Billy Graham when he came to Aberdeen back in 1990 to preach for three nights at Pataudry Stadium.

He was Billy Graham's driver so he drove him from Pataudry to wherever he needed to go. And my friend used to say about Billy Graham, this fantastic amazing preacher through whose ministry millions were brought to Christ.

And never a man spoke more powerfully about Jesus than Billy Graham. He had never met a man who prayed more than Billy Graham. He'd never met a man who prayed more than Billy Graham.

How then can we be more like Jesus in his consistency and his integrity? By believing the gospel he preached and lived out.

God will be to God to fill us also. To welcome his dynamic gospel transformation of our hearts.

[30 : 11] The effectiveness of our public witness for Jesus will only reach as far as the vibrancy of our private relationship with Jesus. God will be to God about God if first we are speaking to God about the people we love.

I want to be careful here because who we are in public as Christians does matter but God sets a premium on our hearts. Only as we are growing in our heart relationship with him through faith in the gospel of his son shall we demonstrate his love and glory in our lives.

So then what about your hearts? What about my heart? What are we in private when no one else but God can see?

I'm going to leave you with that question. Urging us to spend this afternoon examining ourselves as to where we stand before God and encouraging us to return to the gospel of Christ's grace for gospel transformation growth change?

What are we in private with God when no one else but God can see us?