

Three Unusual Encounters, One Greatest Need

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Date: 26 February 2017

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[0 : 0 0] Just think about how long. How long do you think you can last without your smartphone? Maybe a few hours? If you're good, maybe a few days?

So with technology these days, it's so easy to be connected with family and friends. It's a means to an end, isn't it? We can actually communicate. But we know that deep down it shows our need for something much deeper because we're all social beings.

It's really hard. For me, for example, I couldn't survive longer than maybe 10, maybe 20 seconds without checking Facebook. Self-confessed social media addict.

But whether you are a social media addict like myself or you're one of those people who are awaiting the arrival of the remastered, to be resurrected, glorious, indestructible.

How good is that? Nokia 3310. Many reasons why that's kind of still a classic. The point is that we long for connection. We long for a deep, meaningful connection with one another.

[1 : 0 9] For God actually says in Genesis 1, 18, which is on the slide, that we are created to be with one another. God says it's not good for man to be alone.

And so today we're here as people longing for the real connection. And being disconnected is kind of our greatest problem. If you've got your Bibles, keep them open.

And we're going to go through three stories, continuing our series in Luke. This is what I call three separate, unusual encounters. But each with a specific point, as Luke is actually trying to paint us a picture of showing us who this Jesus truly is.

So in his three encounters, Luke gives us clues. And we can see that as they're unexpected, we find that they all point us to who this Jesus is and what he can do for us.

The first encounter, starting at verse 12, we see Jesus and a leper. The life of a leper was tough, to put it in an easy way.

[2 : 1 3] He had no connection. He had no mobile phone. He couldn't connect to the internet, but it was so much more worse than that. So I just want to kind of put yourself in the shoes of a leper. Just imagine this for a second.

You tried to find people to talk to in real life, but they would avoid you. They'd yell stuff to each other to tell you that you'd be coming, approaching, and they'd even run away from you.

Some of them might even throw things at you just to get you to go away. You had this ultimate disconnect. You know, some of you may have a fear of missing out, a FOMO. This leper, he had LOMO, a lifetime of missing out.

He was disconnected from society. Look with me at verse 12. He was covered in leprosy. It's not just a spot here and there.

And out of sheer desperation, he goes to Jesus. You see, leprosy during this time of Jesus was more than just a mere skin disease. It was a spiritual condition.

[3 : 1 7] A leper was declared to be unclean before the Jewish law, and therefore they had to live outside the camp. So just have a look with me at Leviticus 13.45, which I've also got on the screen.

I'm just going to read that out for us. The person with such an infectious disease must wear torn clothes, let his hair be unkempt, and cover the lower part of his face, and cry out, unclean, unclean. As long as he has the infection, he remains unclean and must live outside the camp. So in this encounter, the first unusual thing is that we see a leper inside the walls of the city.

That's in verse 12. What is this leper doing inside the city? It's really unusual. He's technically breaking the law. And it really reveals how desperate he is to come and see this Jesus, who you must have heard about, that he has come through towns, and he has the ability to heal.

It would have been a shocking sight. People would have seen him there. It would have been like, you know, if you've seen a horror movie, and the scene kind of changes as a jump scare. There's

like a zombie that's actually come into the side of the city.

[4 : 27] He's defiled, and he needs to be cleansed. He's got a deep need. And so he goes to Jesus, and he asks him, Jesus, are you willing to make me clean?

You know, that word there is not to heal, but it's literally to be cleansed. And as I described, leprosy was a defilement. And what Jesus does next, or what happens next in Luke's account, is really unusual.

And it gives us a clue. This story here is like a foretaste of what will happen next. Jesus touches the leper. And a bit of context is, back then you wouldn't have touched the leper.

Because by touching the leper, you yourself would have been rendered defiled. You would have been made unclean. And as a result, you would have been told to stay outside the walls of the city. But that's exactly what Jesus does. Jesus touches the leper. And what happens next is nothing short of a miracle. We see Jesus' power again, don't we? We see his authority.

[5 : 23] Because what happens next is, the leprosy leaves him. That's what it says. And he was made clean. And so the unusual and unexpected thing is that Jesus touches the leper.

And he doesn't become sick. He doesn't become defiled. The leper actually becomes healed. And as a result, Jesus sends him to the priest, as part of the fulfillment of this Mosaic law, to be restored back into the community.

So the leper is restored after he has been cleansed. The question remains, doesn't it? Who is this Jesus? As I said, Luke is actually trying to show us, by putting clues together.

This could be said to be like the entree. This is the bread, right? This is like when you go to a restaurant, you have that entree, it's a bit of bread, a bit of oil. But we're left asking for more.

Because even the leper, he's like, Who is this? Who touched me? He goes back and is restored.

The second story, the second story is really where the meat of this kind of meal, this passage is.

[6 : 26] Because it is here that Jesus actually begins to teach. And he begins to explain to people why he's actually come. We see here that Jesus has a special power.

From verse 17, we read that Jesus is teaching. He's teaching Pharisees and teachers of the law. They'd come from everywhere. Not just around the area that Jesus was in, Galilee, but literally all over Israel.

These people were the top of the top. The Pharisees of Pharisees. Who were the religious people of the day. I kind of think of it like this was the annual Pharisee conference.

And they've come a long way together to hear this message. And they're coming to ask, Who is this Jesus? And so this kind of scene builds. But they're willing to sit under his teaching.

They come very far. And Luke just adds this small clue there that the power of Jesus to heal, to heal the sick, was on him. It's a kind of clue.

[7 : 26] We're just going to hide, store away. And so these Pharisees gather. And then they're sitting there and teaching. And then suddenly, he looks up.

And there's this rattling of the noise. There's a rustling of the roof. You see one tail come out. And you see a beam of light coming in. You see a head kind of pop up. It's a huge ruckus.

And people are wondering, What on earth is going on? And the roof is literally caving in. But the Pharisees get up. They get up out of their seats. And they look up. And they're like, Is it a bird?

Is it a plane? It's a paralytic. Literally a paralytic disabled person is coming down from the roof. And everyone's eyes are just focused, looking intently on what on earth is going on.

It would have been such a distracting, kind of such an unusual entrance. They've come very far to hear Jesus speak. And this is what happens. And so you see a body coming down slowly.

[8 : 25] And it lands right in front of where Jesus is teaching. And as the paralytic is lowered, everybody's attention is drawn to this. And so this by itself is some unusual entrance.

And everyone's attention is focused on it. But what happens next is actually the most unusual kind of encounter. There's some kind of dialogue. It's a debate that's going on.

You see, what Jesus says next is kind of the key to understanding who he is and why he has been sent. And it's unusual. It's unexpected. You see, the paralytic laying there kind of knows Jesus has this authority to heal.

And it would have been expecting Jesus to say, get up and walk. But what does Jesus actually say? He says something that's totally unexpected. He says, your sins are forgiven.

That's in verse 20. Friend, your sins are forgiven. After seeing him lower down onto the ground. And so the Pharisees get up and they're grumbling and they're asking themselves, who is this guy that

claims that he can forgive sins?

[9 : 32] Because they know, as the teachers of the law, that no one can forgive sins but God alone. And they're actually right in doing this. And so they suggest that this guy, he's committing blasphemy.

Who is this guy? But just imagine the poor cripple and his friends have gone through all the effort of blowing him through the roof, you know, at the cost of replacing the roof. And this is what he gets. He gets, your sins are forgiven. He doesn't get anything else than that. But you see here, Jesus is doing something very, very special and very unique. He's actually addressing a much deeper issue. But I've also really kind of struggled with this because what he says next is he questions the Pharisees knowing what they're thinking. He asks them, which is actually easier?

To say your sins are forgiven or to say get up and walk? It's a very perplexing question. It's in verse 22.

[10 : 30] So I've actually kind of prepared something a bit earlier on the slides. And hopefully this will help you in terms of understanding the logic that Jesus is trying to apply here when he's interrogated by the Pharisees.

The first question is, what is easier? What is actually easier in general? So this is open for all of us to answer. Is saying something easier or doing something easier?

And so I'm just going to use two examples to hopefully make the point clear. First example is to say that you're going to the gym. Is it easier to say you're going to the gym? Thanks, Julian.

Or actually deciding to go to the gym, actually going to the gym. Man, I know what the answer for that is. But I've got an even stronger example. Some of you know there was a wedding here yesterday.

But in a wedding, you witness two couples make a vow. Two couples. One couple make a vow. And the question is actually, is it easier to say, you love someone in front of everyone?

[11 : 33] Or is it actually easier to kind of make a lifelong commitment and do marriage for years and years even when times get tough? Answer. It's much easier to say something, isn't it?

In the same way here, Jesus meant that to the Pharisees that it would be easier for him to literally say, your sins are forgiven. It would have been easier to say than get up and walk.

And the reason would have been he just had to say it. There would have been no proof. And no one would have really known if this man's sins were actually forgiven.

The second point I want to make is that what would have been harder for Jesus to do? Question. Healing the paralysis of this man? Healing this man of his kind of physical deformities?

Or having his sins forgiven? Two questions. Which one would have been harder for Jesus to do?

Man, this is really mind-boggling. Mind-boggling, isn't it? Well, the question I'd like to ask you guys is who do you have to be?

[12 : 37] What kind of qualifications do you have to do to do the first? To heal paralysis. What qualifications or abilities must you have? I'm not sure, but maybe if you're a good doctor with a few years training, or maybe if you're a good physiotherapist, you rub his legs long enough with enough kind of recuperative care.

Maybe you could get some action out of him. But is that harder, or is forgiving him of all of his sins? I've got to say, the second account is something that's harder.

And the reason is, throughout history, we've never heard of anyone being able to forgive anyone else's sins except God. And it comes down to this. And that is why the Pharisees are charging Jesus.

No one can forgive sins except God. No human can do it. It is impossible. Even if you tried, you'd have to be God to do it.

I've got one more question just to help us kind of think about the context. This is kind of outside of the story, but the last one is, which is the greater blessing? Being healed physically or being restored spiritually?

[13 : 45] And by answering this question, I think we get to the heart of what Jesus is trying to do in this context right here. What is the man, the crippled man's greatest need?

Is it having his legs restored to be walking? Or is it forgiveness, knowing that he'll be restored back into this eternal, spiritual relationship with God?

Just to bring this point home, I want to ask, you know, if you're aware of someone or you yourself have a physical sickness or you know what it means to suffer with disability, physical ailment, what

does this question mean to you?

Would you rather have your physical ailments fully restored, fully healed? Or can you know that actually your sins being forgiven is the greater blessing?

We heard in Psalm 32 earlier that God actually says, blessed are those who are forgiven. And so forgiveness is actually what Jesus offers this man and he gives it to him.

[14 : 45] Forgiveness is the blessing because there and there he is restored, not just physically, but spiritually. Conflicts and tensions begin to rise as the disputes of the Pharisees are actually correct.

They're right. No one can actually forgive sins. And what we really have here is Luke trying to show us a question. He's asking, who is this person?

What Jesus does next is for the sake of the Pharisees and he says in verse 24, have a look with me. He reveals his true power. He says, but that, in order that you may know, he heals the man. He shows him a sign, everyone there at this Pharisee conference that he has the power to forgive sins. And so that, but that, this kind of forgiveness, this healing is actually a sign of his forgiveness. And so what happens, this man picks up his mat and he goes for a walk and everyone's praising God and rejoicing. He's restored back into a physical health.

[15 : 48] But you see, Jesus is actually doing this just to prove that he has forgiveness. He has authority to forgive sins. And that is the greater need.

And this is what Jesus offers us. This is why he has come. The final encounter, the final unusual encounter is Levi.

Levi. And here, Levi, we see something different, don't we? Because he's not sick physically. But yet, when Jesus calls him, he immediately drops everything to follow him.

And Levi realizes that he has a need before Jesus. He becomes a disciple, which reminds us of Simon Peter the week before, as we look forward to how Jesus teaches on what the requirements of a disciple are.

You see, Levi was a tax collector, and therefore, he was a great outcast. But Jesus here initiates a conversation with him, not just to say hello, but he says, follow me, come be a disciple.

[16 : 55] Something that would have been unthinkable amongst the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. You see, disciples wouldn't have been sinners, like this kind of tax collector.

Levi follows immediately. And Levi's action demonstrates that he understands something about Jesus, that even the Pharisees didn't. He recognizes that Jesus has something to offer him that he deeply needs.

You see, Jesus as an outcast, as a sinner, as he's classified by society, realizes that he has a need, a great need, and this need is the need for forgiveness.

And so he goes to Jesus immediately. He's forgiven. And what happens next is kind of like our final picture. The final picture that Luke puts in here to show what it means to be fully restored back into the community, to enjoy real community and connection with one another, but ultimately with God. You see, in verse 29, Levi doesn't just go follow Jesus, he responds to a new status by hosting a great feast, inviting many of his friends, many tax collectors, and even others.

[18 : 04] This would have been such an unusual scene for Jesus to be eating with his Pharisees and tax collectors, the scum of society, the worst of the worst.

Yet, here we see the real mission of Jesus because the Pharisees ask him, they ask the disciples specifically, why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?

And Jesus' response, his final response in verse 31 and 32 explains truly why he has come, what he is on about, and what he offers us today.

He says, he has come to seek and save the lost. And then using the parable, he explains it's not the healthy that need a doctor, it's the sick. And so, we realize that this is why Jesus has come and this is our greatest need.

It's not physical, it's spiritual. And Jesus longs to be this doctor that looks not just at the symptoms, the signs, but he goes straight to the cause, the root.

[19 : 13] Because you see, sin is our greatest problem. Sin is what disconnects us from one another and ultimately from God. Sin is the greatest defilement. But if we truly see what Luke is trying to say here, that Jesus offers us something as he offered Levi and the tax collectors, he offers us forgiveness.

And we've seen that he has the authority, the power to do so. Because our one great need is forgiveness before anything. And so, we shouldn't make the same mistakes as the Pharisees did. The Pharisees were good at classifying people. Oh, look, there's a sinner, there's a tax collector. We can be tempted to do the same. But what Jesus is saying is that we've actually all sinned and we're all sinners and we're all in need.

And just to kind of show you that in Romans 10, Paul actually makes this very clear by quoting a passage he says, there is no one righteous, not one. We're all sick and we're all suffering from the same disease.

And even just like as the leper is defiled and just as the paralytic needs help with his legs, we have a great spiritual condition which is this disconnect from God.

[20 : 31] But we know, don't we, that this is the good news. This is the best news. In 31, Jesus says, it's the sick. And this is, in 32, and this is the reason he has come.

And so, in this final picture, in this final banquet, we see a vision, don't we? We see Jesus eating with the sick and the unrighteous and calling them into repentance.

And so, my first question is, have you seen your great need? Do we know our great need? Well, we'd be like the Pharisees who were standing right there in front of Jesus when this offer was made.

But they didn't do anything to kind of take that next step. We need to respond in a different way. We need to respond like the leper, like the paralytic and like Levi who kind of see their need.

And as we do so, we actually become kind of this group of sinners and tax collectors, right?

Because this is who Jesus has come for. And we gather around him.

[21 : 35] And as he calls us to gather, we feast and we are restored. We're called into repentance.

And even as we do this, you know, later as we have chicken and chips, we eat as sinners and tax collectors, those who need to go to Jesus because we know what he offers.

And even a bit later as we do confession and assurance, it's time to do business with God, to give to him and to ask of him only what he can do for us. And I think it's only an understanding what Jesus has to offer you personally, that's when we can actually know the gospel and know how we can give this to the world and explain it and proclaim it to others.

You see, as we respond and as we're eating as tax collectors and sinners, people are naturally drawn. They're asking, what does this group have?

And so we can go to them and say, Jesus is looking for people just like you. We're not righteous, we're not healthy, we're actually very sick, but we do know the one who can restore us, the great sin doctor.

This clinic is open, always. But more than that, he's like the technician, the great spiritual technician who will come out in his van and he'll connect you, connecting you back to God and connecting you back to others.

[22 : 54] And so, friends, as we finish, as I pray, let us remind ourselves that we can fellowship together, knowing the great gospel that Jesus has come to save us as sinners.

Let me pray. Father, thank you that you visited us. In your son, Jesus, and that you are God and that you have the power to save and the power to seek and save those who don't know you.

We pray that we may be a community not of Pharisees but of sinners and tax collectors knowing what we really need, forgiveness. Help us know and relish what it means to be restored in community and so that we can bring more people in by proclaiming this great news.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.