

Luke 5:17-31

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[0 : 00] So, this is an amazing story. It's hard to imagine what it would have been like to be there.

As the roof of the house opens, it's like the gates of heaven opened that day. It strikes me that it was Jesus himself who taught his disciples to pray, right? He said, your kingdom come, your will be done.

On earth, note that language, on earth as it is in heaven. And then Jesus fulfills the prayers that he teaches his disciples to pray.

Imagine sunlight piercing through the roof as there's swirling dust from the deconstruction that's happening in the house. And Jesus says to them in verse 24 that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth.

To forgive sins, I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home. So, what we discover here is precisely what Dr. Luke was saying. It's that this healing of this man was a sign.

[1 : 06] It was a revelation of something more deep, more profound, more glorious, more life-giving than anything else. It's that Jesus has authority to forgive. So, what Luke wants us to see is that in Jesus, we are seeing the power of God at work on earth.

In Jesus, we see God reestablishing his authority over human life. In Jesus, we see God liberating the human heart from the paralyzing and crippling effects of sin.

It was a few years earlier that a man named David said, Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the person against whom the Lord counts no iniquity.

See, this is the blessing that Jesus wants you and me to experience today. This is the blessing that Jesus wants every person to experience every day. And so, I'm here to ask you really simply, do you know the sweetness of his forgiveness in your life?

Do you know that this blessing is your greatest need and it is also your greatest hope? And do you know what it's like to live under the liberating authority of Jesus' kindness and grace?

[2 : 24] See, when I do marriage prep with couples, I like to ask them a lot of really interesting questions. But I often start with a very simple one. What is the key to a lifelong, God-honoring, faithful and joyful marriage?

Really simple, right? What's the key? And I love hearing the variety of answers. It's just so great.

You get to know couples pretty quickly. You know, some are like, never go to bed angry.

And I'm like, good luck with that. Go on a date night every week. And I'm like, you better live near family. Establish clear and consistent lines of communication.

Have lots of kids or don't have any kids. You know, one of the two. And it's so fascinating. I just let them go. And then it's even more interesting watching their faces when I give them my answer.

I go, get to know forgiveness. Because unless your heart understands forgiveness, it's going to be really difficult. Last year, my grandmother died and my sister adopted a two-year-old baby girl, or two-week-old baby girl, sorry, in the same week.

[3 : 29] I know some of us in our church family have lost family members in recent weeks and months. And some of us have received new children, I think, even in the last few days, have been brought into the world.

And it's in moments like these that I find myself reflecting on life and death. On my grandma's broken life, on my niece's beautiful beginning. My grandma knew the woes of the world, and my niece doesn't even know what life's going to bring her yet.

And I ask myself, what is it that I wish my grandmother knew more deeply in her life? What is it that I wish my niece will know as she grows up? And I think it comes back to this, the joy of forgiveness.

The freedom and the healing and the blessing of knowing God's overwhelming kindness to those that do not deserve it. The joy and the freedom of forgiveness. This, according to Jesus, when he is

faced with a man who is paralyzed, is the heart of the gospel that he wants to bring to bear into the world.

It's what he's come to earth to do and to give. It's what he has come to speak with sovereign authority and clarity. That the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.

[4 : 44] And it's that authority that is the special focus of our passage. But I want to remind us, before getting into that authority, about what sin is. I think what Mark and what Will just said is such a helpful thing.

Because it can be easy for us to think of sin as just where I've slipped up in a few places. Or to think of sin as the garbage that clutters my life. Or even more, to think of sin as the sewage of my soul. And all these are gripping images, but none of them quite hit the nail on the head. It's what Mark was talking about. Sin is shoving off God. It's a personal rejection of God. It's saying, God, I'd rather not live with you.

I'd rather live without you. It's, I'm in charge. I'm elevated now in the place of God. And it's, no to you and your rules.

It's offending God and what he actually thinks is good for our human flourishing. So what we discover as sin is not first and foremost a horizontal reality. It's a vertical reality.

[5 : 44] And all the horizontal ways in which we sin against each other are actually the fruit or the result of our fundamental horizontal rejection or vertical rejection of God.

Which is why, for example, like the psalmist David can pray in Psalm 51, after committing adultery, if there's ever a sin against another person, he can pray this. Against you, God, you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.

That's why the scribes and Pharisees questioned Jesus in that crowded house on that day. Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?

See, at the heart of our passage is a question of authority, which is ultimately rooted in a question of identity. Who is this Jesus that gives him authority to do these things?

See, Jesus came to a world suffering from a crisis of authority in part because they did not know Jesus' identity. And we are living in a world suffering from a crisis of authority in part because we do not know the beauty of Jesus' identity.

[7 : 02] Who can forgive sins but God alone? We can see this crisis of authority in Africa as religious extremists and tribal distinctions continue to lead to deadly violence.

We can see this crisis of authority in Ukraine and Russia as a dictator is overreaching the bounds of his authority. We can see this crisis of authority in China as a communist regime seeks to squelch any spark of democratic revolution.

We can see this crisis of authority in Central and South America as drug lords ravage cities and governments benefit off the proceeds. And we can see this crisis of authority in the West, right on our own doorstep, in our own neighborhood, as each individual is given the impossible task of defining for himself or herself what it means to be human.

It's no wonder that so many of us are so anxious. It's no wonder that so many of our youth and our young adults have become so disillusioned with any and all claims to authority.

Yet Jesus does not back down here. The road to life is narrow, and his claim to a divine authority is still unapologetic and challenging.

[8 : 25] But could it be that in Jesus, the earth discovers a different kind of authority? Could it be that in Jesus, the world encounters a different use of authority?

Not one that's oppressive and takes, but one that liberates and gives? Not one that diminishes and dehumanizes, but authority that redeems and restores? Not one that condemns, but one that forgives?

So the question I'm asking is, what if Jesus' authority to forgive is the only answer to the authority crisis in our world? What would it look like to follow him?

I'll just let you sit with that question for a second. I'm going to give the kids a two-minute warning. I'm going to come back and ask two application questions. Hey, kiddos, we've got two minutes.

Two minutes. I can think of three. Yeah, that sounds good. Let's do it. We won't do four.

[9 : 33] We won't do four. Two questions. As we grapple with the Son of Man's authority to forgive, what is a sign that I personally am living under the liberating authority of Jesus' grace?

What is a sign that I'm living under it, really living under it, enjoying its blessing? And I think Levi's example in verse 27, 28, 29 is the key.

He left everything to follow Jesus, we're told. Meaning, he detached from his old way of life and he attached himself to Jesus.

And for a tax collector, this probably included leaving behind all the financial benefits of the authority that he had as a representative of the Romans.

He had the power of the Romans to do what he wanted in order to seek financial gain. And it meant detaching from that old way of life and pursuing Jesus and following him no matter what it cost him.

[10 : 38] But we see that for Levi, this is a joy. Notice that he feasts with Jesus. He celebrates the abundance of Jesus' grace.

And he sets the table and invites his friends to join him so that they too can know the God who forgives sinners. So we discover in Levi what it looks like to repent and discover new life under God's forgiveness.

It is to leave the old way of life, to follow Jesus, and then to celebrate Jesus' grace by inviting others to join in as well. That's the image that we're given of Levi, of somebody who's living under the beauty and the authority of Jesus' grace.

And the second question is, what is the sign that we are not living under the authority of Jesus' grace? And we are given the example in verse 30 of the scribes and the Pharisees.

And what are they doing? They're grumbling at Jesus. Notice the word grumbling. What does it look like when we're not living under Jesus' grace? We're quick to judge, constantly questioning others' motives and intentions and behaviors.

[11 : 54] And we're slow to forgive, struggling to see the grace of God at work in others. We protest and we police. We withdraw and change churches and seek greener pastures.

Or we complain and critique and control until things change in our favor. And most significantly, we refuse to admit our need for Jesus' forgiveness.

And when others need it, we refuse to extend it to them. See, we're going to look at the parable of the prodigal son in a couple weeks.

And I think that's a beautiful image of what Jesus is getting at here. Like the older brother and the prodigal son, we can refuse to join the party of sinners who know they are sick and in need of a physician.

But in the image of Levi, Jesus tells us it does not have to be this way. You can know the blessing of my grace. And you can follow me.

[12 : 52] And you can rejoice with me. And you can invite others to rejoice with me. And you can walk away a man who is amazed and glorifying God. Or a woman who is filled with awe at the extraordinary things that God has done.

Because as Jesus once said, blessed are the poor in spirit. For theirs and theirs alone is the kingdom of heaven. Friends, I speak these things to you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.