

Luke 5:17-39 - 3 Questions and Answers

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- [0 : 0 0] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.
- We're going to be looking at God's Word this morning in Luke chapter 5. Luke 5. As we prepare to do so, I want to share something with you about myself that may be true of others in this room.
- I don't do change very well. I have been running the same route every morning for the last two years.
- I have been eating the same breakfast cereal every morning since high school. I typically wait months to download the new operating system for my phone because it changes everything and messes me up and I can't deal with it.
- I love to have a schedule, a plan to follow it. It works the way it's supposed to. And I'm often not pleasant to be married to or to work for when it's thrown off.
- [1 : 1 2] Change can be really hard. And it's one of the hard things for me about Jesus. Because when Jesus shows up in the world and in your life, He changes everything, doesn't He?
- He's honest about that. He tells you that's the reality. Maybe it's not all at once. And ultimately, it's in a beautiful, wonderful way. But still, it's change.
- And it's hard. He says He's making all things new, right? And that includes my world and my heart and my life. Not just one time.
- Not just something happens when I meet Him. But over and over, He's turning things upside down as we've seen in Luke. He's renovating and restoring me and everything else.
- And there are in Luke chapter 5 some Pharisees and teachers of the law who encounter Jesus and they find the newness and the change that surrounds Him difficult to process and to swallow.
- [2 : 1 8] They ask Him questions in three different encounters that help us see some glorious truths about Jesus and then challenge us to consider our response to who Jesus is and how He changes things.
- We'll read these encounters as we go this morning. But first, let's pray and ask for God's help as we look at His Word. Pray with me. Father, the words of that song that James just sang are true of me.
- I'm a desperate man in desperate need of Your saving hand to come and rescue me. That's where I live.
- That's where we live. I'm desperate for You. I'm in need of You. And so we open Your Word this morning, Father.
- It's the reason we come to Your Word is that we need You to speak to us. All of us do. And so, Father, would You speak to our hearts?

[3 : 28] For the one who would presume to speak this morning, would You especially speak to my heart and speak through and in spite of me that Your Word might be clear and that the hope of Jesus might meet desperate people in a way that changes everything.

Make our hearts open to that this morning. Do Your work through Your Word and Your Spirit, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. The first question that Jesus gets this morning comes in the encounter I was just talking with the kids about a few minutes ago.

So you've heard a great summary of it from them. But follow along in Luke chapter 5 at verse 17. On one of those days, as He was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem.

And the power of the Lord was with Him to heal. And behold, some men were bringing on a bed a man who was paralyzed, and they were seeking to bring him in and lay him before Jesus. But finding no way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the midst before Jesus.

And when he saw their faith, he said, Man, your sins are forgiven you. The scribes and the Pharisees began to question, saying, Who is this who speaks blasphemies?

[5 : 00] Who can forgive sins but God alone? When Jesus perceived their thoughts, He answered them, Why do you question in your hearts? Which is easier to say, Your sins are forgiven or rise and walk?

But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. He said to the man who was paralyzed, I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go home. And immediately he rose up before them and picked up what he had been lying on and went home glorifying God.

In amazement seized them all and they glorified God and were filled with awe saying, We have seen extraordinary things today. What a neat story, right?

A remarkable display of divine power and healing and forgiving. An honest depiction of the desperation of faith in the paralytic's friends that we were just talking about with the kids.

It's one of the most glorious depictions of the word and deed nature of Jesus' kingdom in one story. Forgiving sins and healing disease.

[6 : 14] But the focus of the story centers in on the significance of Jesus' forgiving sins, doesn't it? We've seen him heal all sorts of people.

Cast out demons and so forth. But here he sees this paralyzed man lowered through the roof right in front of him. And his first response is to say what? Your sins are forgiven.

That's what sets off the Pharisees and teachers of the law, isn't it? Causes them to ask the first question. Forgive sins? Who is this blasphemer?

I thought only God could forgive sins, right? Well, they're right, aren't they? I mean, after all, the only one who can forgive a sin is the one against whom the sin has been committed.

And ultimately, all sins are committed against God. The religious leaders knew this well. They studied their Old Testaments. In the Old Testament, God is the one who forgives sins.

[7 : 18] There is a rare instance of a prophet or someone like that speaking for God and communicating God's intent to forgive. But God is the one who forgives sin.

And so from a human perspective, how would that play itself out? If you were someone who had sinned and was seeking forgiveness of that sin in the Old Testament, you went to God through the proper ceremonies, didn't you?

The rituals and sacrifices at the temple where the priest could pronounce that the sins had been appropriately paid for. But that doesn't go on.

This guy, Jesus, just declares it to be so. Your sins are forgiven. What in the world? That's not how it works around here with us Jews, Jesus.

Who does he think he is? And that's exactly the point Jesus is making here, isn't it? It's all about who he is.

[8 : 22] Which is easier, Jesus says? Saying your sins are forgiven you or saying rise and walk? Either Jesus is making the point that both of those are very difficult things which require divine power.

Or perhaps making the point that it's easier to say your sins are forgiven because nobody can look around and verify whether or not it actually happened.

And so in order that they may know of his divine power, that you may know that he actually does have authority to forgive sins when he says it.

Jesus says what? Rise and walk. The point either way is Jesus saying how can I forgive sins? It's because of who I am.

I do have that authority. Let me show you my divine power in a way that you can see and it will be undeniable. The reality of the release that I've come to bring.

[9 : 29] And so the deeds that you see in front of you are validating the words you hear spoken. Things are changing. This is different. There is a new priest here who speaks for God and forgives sins on his own authority.

He just says it and sins are forgiven. Just imagine for a minute if that were really true. Full and free forgiveness of all of your sins without lots of rituals and sacrifices and religious ceremonies.

Just your sins could be forgiven and wiped away. I mean you wouldn't have to work your way back into someone's good graces. You wouldn't have to outperform the people around you.

You wouldn't have to be a better husband or wife or friend or kid for an indefinite period of time after you've made a big mistake to be free from it and to feel loved and accepted again.

Imagine if you just had to get someone to push or pull or drag you into Jesus. It's like a car dealership ad that I've heard on the radio many times.

[10 : 47] If you want to trade your car in, whatever condition, it doesn't matter. If you can push, pull or drag it in, you're going to get credit. Your condition doesn't matter.

Just get to Jesus and you're set. Imagine if that were true. Wow, if that were true, there might be hope for me. There might be hope for my friend who has blown it.

Maybe I could even show my face to my ex-husband or my boss or even to God again. I don't know.

I'm not sure. The religious leaders definitely weren't sure. That's not how it works around there. To be honest, in most of our lives, that's not how it works when we've messed up, is it?

I'm not sure that's really how it works, Jesus. Well, Jesus moves on to our second scene. It's in verse 27 that it begins.

[11 : 50] After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector named Levi sitting at the tax booth. And he said to him, follow me.

And leaving everything, he rose and followed him. And Levi made him a great feast in his house. And there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them.

And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples saying, Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners? And Jesus answered them, Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.

I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. While we're talking about sins needing to be forgiven, let's just go ahead and deal with the big ones, why don't we?

Let's just start with the tax collectors, Jesus says. I could describe to you how despised tax collectors were in this culture, but if you've ever been audited by the IRS before, I don't think I need to.

[12 : 57] It's still very similar. Except imagine adding to the distasteful experience you may have had. Imagine adding to that guys who made their living off of cheating you even more than you owed.

Taking a cut for themselves off of that. And they had the ruling powers behind them backing them up. So there's nothing you could do. You couldn't touch them. These were Jews who were traitors to the Jewish people.

They were loyal to Rome. They took money from their people and gave it to the enemy. And they got rich off of it. These are the Jews.

Don't come in the synagogue. But Jesus walks up to one of these. Levi. Matthew. And He calls Levi to follow Him.

And sure enough, He does. Leaving everything at great cost to Himself. Of the really great career He had and the money He was able to make. He follows Jesus.

[13 : 59] And He's so convinced of the value and worth of Jesus that He does what? He throws a party. So that all of His friends can meet Jesus.

His tax collectors and others who came. These would be friends, of course, who are as outcast as He was. You can just assume that Levi had more friends in low places than Garth Brooks.

I worked on that for a long time. That was a really important line. Get that in mind. I do want you to have this picture of a group of people who are not just one Levi and some other.

These are people who are all like that. Who aren't supposed to be around the Jews. That any respectable rabbi would never be found with much less eating. Jesus gladly eats with them, which is what leads to the second question.

Because see, now the religious leaders aren't just questioning. They're grumbling, the text tells us. Very bothered by this Jesus. They ask Him what? Why? Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?

[15 : 09] You see, then, as now in many ways, sharing a meal with someone meant sharing life, too. You were equals, so to speak, or friends.

You had fellowship together. You had things in common. And that was not the way that things worked for the religious insiders of the day.

These tax collectors and sinners were not just informally or relationally. They were formally and officially unclean. And so unwelcome in the clean lives of the religious.

Lest they rub off on them. And once again, we see what we've seen multiple times in Luke's Gospel already. That Jesus is building a new community.

Where instead of sinners making Him unclean, He makes them clean. You see, it works in reverse from the way the religious leaders are thinking.

[16 : 11] Just like with the leper from last week. When Jesus touches him, Jesus should get the highly contagious leprosy, right? That's how it works.

But instead, the leper catches Jesus' even more highly contagious purity. Doesn't He? That's what happens. The leper doesn't make Him unclean.

Jesus touches him and makes Him clean. And Jesus says in no uncertain terms that this is His purpose in coming to earth. That's the purpose statement there in verse 32.

I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. This is why I'm here. Not to find clean people to hang out with, but rather to find unclean people to make clean.

That's what He's about. Jesus says, I've come to forgive sins. And because of that, I'm coming for those who know they have sins to be forgiven. Not for those who think they don't.

[17 : 17] Think of it this way. Imagine Governor Bentley decides tomorrow that he is pronouncing a pardon. He is going to pardon. There's going to be forgiveness of every crime that has ever been committed in the state of Alabama.

In the history of the state. Because it's a big one, right? That's usually not the way pardons go. Every crime ever committed. For some of you, that's a pretty big deal. For others of you, you're thinking, oh, there's that speeding ticket I got a few years ago.

I mean, I guess that would be nice to get that money back. I bet for some of you, not even that. Not even the speeding ticket. But how does the inmate on death row in Alabama receive that same news?

Crimes? Pardoned? All of them? Best news ever. Right? I'm free. It's time to throw a party.

We're celebrating. Everybody's invited. Nothing better could have happened to me. And so you see what happens. It's those kinds of people who flock to the new guy offering free and full forgiveness just by getting dragged into him, right?

[18 : 38] That's the new in crowd that the Pharisees were so sure that they were. The sinners are the ones who can't wait to get to Jesus.

And when they're with him, what do they do? They throw parties. They celebrate. They can't believe what's happening. You see, actual, practical, lived out belief in the reality of free forgiveness that we just kind of skeptically imagined a minute ago creates a new community, doesn't it?

There's different kinds of people that become part of that community. It's a community of sinners where the first vow you have to take to be a member is, I'm a sinner.

I got problems. Jesus not only came to invite sinners in, but he also did not come for those who don't think they need forgiveness, right?

I did not come for the righteous, the healthy, who don't need a doctor. Everyone in Jesus' kingdom shares that need.

[19 : 48] That's a hard and sobering reality for religious church people like many of us, isn't it? Because we don't naturally see our need really quickly.

We're used to be the benevolent ones helping the needy. We're the ones who give charity to those who need it, not the ones who receive it, right?

Check our taxes if you want to know for sure. That's what we're like. We're the ones who are thinking of those who are in need. See, the sobering reality is that we in the church often just assume that Jesus came for us.

Well, I mean, we are in church after all, and we do come regularly. Of course, if Jesus came, we would be the ones that he would come for.

I've got to ask you this morning, have you really looked your sin in the eye? Have you really seen the desperate condition that you're in before a holy God?

[20 : 50] Really seen yourself and realized you're on spiritual death row with your only hope being the rescue, the forgiveness of God?

Jesus came to call sinners who had no one else to rescue them. Friend, did Jesus come for you?

That's who he came for. Did Jesus come for you? If you have no other hope, then yes, he did. How about corporately?

We've got it right on the books. We've already talked about it this morning. Some of our newest members have led us in this. The first thing we say in becoming a member of the church, I'm a sinner in the sight of God.

I'm not worthy. I have no hope apart from Jesus. Not that you have to be good enough to get in, but you have to admit you're bad enough to get in.

[21 : 51] What a weird place. We say those things, but do we believe it and live it? I ask you to think, when we're together, do we celebrate Jesus more than ourselves?

When we gather to celebrate, do the religious elite or the morally corrupt feel more at home with us? Are we ever afraid sinners will corrupt us?

Or are we regularly confident that our Savior will cleanse them? See, Jesus changes things in ways that stretch us.

That's not a comfortable dynamic to be created for many of us. It's stretched for the religious leaders to the point that they're very uncomfortable, isn't it?

But if we want to be a part of His kingdom, if we want to reflect the reality of the family of God that Jesus makes us a part of, we will allow Him and His full and free forgiveness to change the shape of our community individually and corporately.

[23 : 04] Jesus comes to bring forgiveness of sins and gather to Himself people who see their need for it. Finally, scene 3.

Next verse, verse 33. And they said to Him, to Jesus, The disciples of John fast often and offer prayers, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours eat and drink.

And Jesus said to them, Can you make wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days.

He also told them a parable. No one tears a piece from a new garment and puts it on an old garment. If he does, he will tear the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins.

If he does, the new wine will burst the skins, and it will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed. But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins. And no one after drinking old wine desires new, for he says, the old is good.

[24 : 14] Probably while seated at the same table with Levi and his friends, or maybe just afterwards, Jesus hears another question in the statement of the religious leaders.

Why do your disciples eat and drink instead of fasting? In other words, why all these parties and feasts instead of days of fasting and mourning as prescribed by the religious leaders?

That's how you're supposed to relate to God. That's how the religious leaders had taught people. You were to mourn and to look to His provision. That was the heart behind fasting for the people of God.

And Jesus, in answer to that question, gives a relational example that they knew very well. He talks about a wedding. You see, Jews were told to fast two days a week.

Every week, two days of fasting. But there was an exception. And that was for weddings. The wedding, with the wedding party gathered around the bride and the groom, was to be a feast for a whole week.

[25 : 25] Seven straight days, and none of the seven were you to stop and fast. Seven straight days of feasting. And Jesus says, you would never make them fast during the wedding, would you?

Because the bride and groom are there with them celebrating. Jesus says, I'm here and we are in the midst of that feasting right now. We're no longer fasting and longing for God to provide.

God has provided. God has come. I am here. I'm the one who's been long awaited. The one who has to be celebrated. Then he adds a couple of parables about clothing and wine that highlight the fact that new and old don't fit together.

When something dynamically new comes, you can't just keep doing things the old way. It won't work. You can't keep thinking of God and relating to Him the way you have been because God has shown up and changed everything.

The full and free forgiveness doesn't just change the way you relate to other people. It changes the way you relate to God Himself.

[26 : 39] When the King is present, the subjects of the kingdom celebrate Him joyfully. When the one with full and free forgiveness of sins is with you, then you throw a party like no other celebration you've ever had.

Interestingly for us, we get to do both. When Jesus was here with His disciples, they feasted rather than fasting.

But Jesus says in this passage, there will be a time when they will fast again. It's part of the already and not yet nature of Jesus' kingdom in our time.

The King has already come and brought in the kingdom, but not yet fully. The King will return to bring the kingdom fully forever.

So we feast and we fast. We celebrate His coming and we long for His return. We enjoy the life that Jesus has given to us in Himself.

[27 : 42] The full and free forgiveness of our sins which we know today. And we long for His return and mourn over the brokenness, the ongoing battle with sin and its effects from which He has not yet, but will soon deliver us forever.

So what makes the difference in all three of these interactions in this passage? What makes the difference in all three things that are changing?

It's Jesus, right? What's the answer to all three of the Pharisees' questions? It's Jesus. Just like all good kids learn in Sunday school, the answer is always Jesus.

Jesus. Not always, but almost always. It's who He is and what He has come to do. He's the Savior of the world.

Come as the new priest to forgive sins and create a new community of forgiven sinners in a new and joyous relationship with God. That's who He is and what He's come to do.

[28 : 53] It's what Luke wants us to see in these stories. Jesus changes everything. So how do we respond to Jesus? I think the responses of people who encounter Jesus in this passage are really instructive for us.

Look as we think about our own hearts at the former paralytic in verse 25. Immediately, He rose up before them, picked up what He'd been lying on, went home glorifying God.

And then you see the rest of the crowd. Verse 26. The paralytic is now glorifying God in joy and freedom, jumping and running, praising God.

The crowd is glorifying God with wonder and amazement. How amazing that I'm healed. How amazing that He forgives sins. And as you go through the rest of the passage, people begin demonstrating the faith of the paralytic and his friends.

In their desperation to get near Jesus, right? All these others that begin to crowd around Him and show up at the parties. Desperate to get near Him. And when they do, they celebrate Him.

[30 : 15] Crossing physical and social and spiritual barriers. Saying nothing can keep me from Jesus and from celebrating Him. Does your heart respond that way?

To the good news of Jesus? Does it have that kind of unbridled joy? Is that the way you feel this morning? Or do you feel as though you've lost your sense of joy and wonder at Jesus?

If you have, it may be because you've lost your sense of your need for Him. What drives people to Jesus in this passage is things like paralysis, sin, need, desperation.

But what keeps people from Him is the opposite of that. It's pride. It's self-sufficiency. It's health. You see, there are others in this passage less joyful and amazed than the paralytic and the crowds and the tax collectors and sinners.

They're the religious leaders who respond to Jesus as we've seen with questioning and grumbling. They keep their distance from Him. Why? Perhaps for many reasons.

[31 : 37] But at least this passage tells us theological pride. They were hung up, right, on who can forgive sins. And they were actually right about that theological question.

Only God can forgive sins. But the fact that they were stuck on that question kept them from Jesus, didn't it? Then their social pride and their moral pride.

Being too good and too proper to celebrate either the unclean sinners or the newly arrived king. You see, they've been relating to God for years on the basis of right theology.

Right community and right behavior. Knowing the right things. Hanging with the right people. Doing the right things or at least enough of them. And Jesus has come to change that.

I don't like change. That's a hard one. Have you been relating to God as though He's your teacher? Just grading to see how much you know and feeling some days pretty good about your theological knowledge.

[32 : 48] Especially compared to the next guy. Have you been relating to God as though He's impressed by the company you keep? You know, hanging around the church most Sundays.

And spending most of your time with pretty good people. As though that's what really matters to God. And He's very impressed by the people that you associate with. Have you been relating to God as though He's evaluating your moral performance like an Olympic judge?

Some days pretty impressed. Some days, a little stumble. Tenth of a point. Doesn't take much. Better straighten back up. You relate to God those ways?

Or are you willing to give up all of those and any other ways that you tend to relate to God in order to have Jesus and be found in Him forgiven and clean and secure?

Trusting Jesus means God is your Father who has removed your sins far away from you and loved you with an everlasting love because you're His child.

[33 : 58] It's a new and unparalleled relationship. You've known nothing like it. It's the way you relate to God now. You have Jesus and His full and free forgiveness.

And that means you have a new way of relating to God. You're a forgiven, beloved child of your Heavenly Father. Are you so desperate for Jesus and His forgiveness that you'll dig through the roof or anything else it takes to get to Him?

Do you still need Him like that every day? Is your faith in Him such that no one and nothing else will satisfy you and make you deeply joyful?

You have to get to Jesus. Listen, here's the beauty and glory of this passage and this Savior. It is really true.

Push it. Pull Him. Drag yourself into Jesus and He'll take you. Yes, that's true. But it is even so much better than that. You see, Jesus comes and finds you broken down on the side of the highway.

[35 : 12] That's the beauty of what's happening with Jesus. He comes running toward paralyzed sinners who can't get to Him. You see, the thing about forgiveness in the paralytic story is not merely that Jesus is acting like the new priest when He declares forgiveness of sins.

There's something else missing. If you were going to get forgiveness of sins, you didn't just need the priest, but something else needed to be there. What else did the priest need to have? A sacrifice. You needed a new priest to pronounce sins and a new sacrifice.

Jesus is both the new priest and the new sacrifice. That's how He can declare sins on His own authority because He comes running to the cross to give His life in the place of sinners as a sacrifice for their sins.

He runs toward us this morning right where we are in the lowest place that you can find yourself, not able to get over your shame and your guilt to come towards Him.

And He comes running towards you and says, I've crossed all those barriers. I've removed all the hindrances that would keep you from me. So we don't even have to climb and cross all those barriers keeping us from Jesus.

[36 : 31] We just have to trust that He's crossed them for us. That's the good news of the gospel. If you've never trusted Him, trust Him today.

If you've forgotten your great Savior and your sin and your shame over it, trust Him again. Let's pray. Jesus, what a wonderful Savior you are.

would you make us desperate for you? That there would be nothing else that fulfills us and nothing that could keep us from you.

Thank you that nothing could keep you from us. That your love for us was so great that you came after us and you have rescued us.

You've paid the price in full and so we have a heavenly Father who otherwise ought to disown us. Thank you, Jesus, for the forgiveness of sins that we find in your cross.

[37 : 44] We praise you for it. Amen. For more information, visit us online at [southwood.org](https://yetanothersermon.host).