

Prayer and Faith

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[0 : 00] And I want us just to go through this very briefly. It's a big section. But we read there at the verse 16 about Jesus after he had dealt with a leper and then great crowds had gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities.

It tells us in Luke chapter 5 verse 16, but he would withdraw to desolate places and pray. And then we read of Jesus healing the man with the paralysis, the paralytic, and then the calling of Levi and so on.

I would have to ask the question here as we see in verse 16 of how Jesus would withdraw to desolate places and pray. I have to ask the question, what place does prayer have in your life and in my life?

Is it something that's just marginal or is it something that is a vital part of your life? Well, I think the kind of Christian that you will be depends very largely upon the place that you give to prayer.

It's not something that other people can talk about. They cannot judge your prayer life. That is something that's very private between yourself and the Lord.

[1 : 28] But the fact is prayer really is like oxygen. Just in the same way as we need oxygen to operate, oxygen to live, oxygen to do what we have to do every single day.

So with prayer. And if we do not have, we all know that if we don't have enough oxygen, if we don't have enough air, then our capacity to do things won't be so good.

We won't do things nearly so well, so efficiently. For instance, when athletes or footballers are going to some competitions, but I think it was, if I remember right, the likes of Mexico, when the Olympic Games were in Mexico and the World Cup were in Mexico, that for a long time prior to the actual Games, athletes went to places of high altitude to get their bodies to adapt to competing in situations where the oxygen levels would be lower than would be normal down at sea level.

Because they knew that if they went straight away from just without acclimatizing themselves, then they just wouldn't be able to compete. They wouldn't stand a chance. Oxygen is absolutely vital for life.

And similarly, prayer. And Jesus knew how important prayer was. And although Jesus Christ is God, he is also man.

[3 : 03] And in our nature, he was dependent upon God. He was dependent. He had to be, to be a representative.

And he was trusting in his Father. He was being led by the Spirit. He had the Spirit without measure. But Jesus realized how vital and how important it was for him to be constantly drawing aside.

So often you find this, that he went up into a mountain to pray. He went into a desolate place to pray. He withdrew from the crowds to pray. He even withdrew from his disciples to pray.

Even at the Garden of Gethsemane, he took that inner tree with him. But even then he left behind to go to pray. All was we find in the life of our Lord that he was going away on his own to pray.

Yes, there was a delight that he found in communion and fellowship with his Father. But there was also this dependence upon his Father. And he knew that this was where his strength in our nature was to be found.

[4 : 10] Because it tells us, again, inner nature, when Jesus healed. When Jesus was dealing with people that their virtue went out of him. Remember when he healed that woman with the issue of blood.

And he said, who touched me? Remember how she was healed in the touching? And she came forward because he knew virtue had gone out of him. So you see, Jesus was being renewed and he was being strengthened all the time.

And my friends, we need that exactly the same. We need it because we're spiritual beings. Not just physical and not just people with minds and with bodies, but also with a soul.

And we need that spiritual breathing. Just as our bodies need air, so our souls need prayer.

Need to come into fellowship, into communion, into oneness with the Lord. Where we exercise this dependence upon him all the time.

[5 : 12] And so this is what we find here with Jesus. Now, again we find that when we move on to verse 17. That we come to one of these healings that I suppose sticks in our mind.

All these incidents and things that are maybe slightly unusual. They kind of stay with us. But before we come to that, we notice in verse 17.

That on one of these days he was teaching Pharisees and teachers of the law. Who were sitting there. Who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem. You see what has happened here.

Here are all the big guns have come out. The word, the fame of Jesus is spreading way beyond up in the north. Up in Nazareth and Cana. Up in Capernaum.

The news has been filtering right down throughout the land. And so these Pharisees and these religious leaders and the rulers and the teachers. They're coming up.

[6 : 15] They've moved up north. They've got to find out for themselves. They've got to hear him. They've got to see. Because this news is filtering through. So this was really a day where Jesus was very much, as it were, under scrutiny.

Now these religious leaders, the Pharisees. It is reckoned that although we are very critical of the Pharisees. And Jesus was very critical of the Pharisees in the sense that he was judgment, passing judgment upon them because of their legalism and because of the refusal to see what was staring them in the face.

They were, at one sense, they were quite extraordinary people. The word, the Hebrew word where the Pharisee came, the word comes, means to divide or to separate.

And it is reckoned that this movement grew out maybe from the time of the ministry of Ezra where there was a call to separate from the heathens round about and to follow God's way and to follow God's law.

But as so often happens, legalism comes in. And where there was originally the following of God's law, then to make sure that you were following God's law properly, then they would add other laws to it just to make absolutely sure.

[7 : 37] In case, just to make sure, in case we break God's law, we better add another law on just to make absolutely sure. And at the end of the day, the whole system was bogged down by legalism because all these other laws that they had built upon the law of God became even more important than God's law.

And they began to lose their way. They were incredibly religious, incredibly dedicated. They were incredibly zealous. But they were hard because it was all law.

It was all trying to do. And that is why Jesus was saying to them all the time, you're missing the point. You're missing the point. Anyway, here we come and we see Jesus and he's got an audience, a huge audience.

But on this particular day, these men bring their friend to Jesus. And I think it's one of these great instances of Scripture because there's no doubt whatever that both the man who was paralyzed and his friends have faith.

And this man who was paralyzed, maybe he is the one who said to his friends, please take me to Jesus. Of course, because he was paralyzed, he couldn't go himself. But he knew that the only hope that he had, just as it was in the case of the leper and just as it was in the case of so many others, they knew that the only hope that they had was Jesus.

[9 : 09] And so they say, this man has his friends. Take him along to where Jesus is. And it's a wonderful thing. This man was persuaded that Jesus was the answer to the problems that he had in life.

Have you got that persuasion today? Because every single one of us in here have problems one way or another. Now, I'm not saying for one moment that if you become a Christian that all your problems will disappear.

They won't. And maybe by becoming a Christian, other problems will arise. But what you do have is with your problems, yes, some of your problems will be sorted by following the Lord Jesus Christ.

But the Lord will open your mind and help you to understand things. He will give you grace. He will give you a sense of peace. He will give you a sense of purpose, even in all these really difficult things.

And that's one of the wonderful things. That even although there are the problems that we're not in any way going to say, and nobody has a right to say that by becoming a Christian, you instantly wave bye-bye to all problems, life is a bed of roses.

[10:30] It doesn't work like that. But what does happen is that there is a sense of identity, a sense of purpose, a sense of meaning, a sense of why you're here, a sense that overrides these things.

Maybe today there are people here who have problems that are really difficult to bear with. There can be problems brought about in 101 different ways.

That every single person in here today has something that will cause them, at one level or another, a degree of anxiety, a degree of pressure.

It's inevitable in life. But Jesus says, look, you come to me, and I'll go through the troubles with you. Be of good cheer, he says. It is I. Be not afraid. So anyway, these friends bring this man to Jesus. And it's very obvious that while the man himself has faith by coming, it's obvious that the friends had faith, because it tells us in verse 20, and when he saw their faith, he said, so he saw their faith as well.

[11:47] And you know, it's a wonderful thing to have friends who have faith. And I'm sure, if you're here today as a Christian, and you look back over your life, you thank the Lord for the friends that you had who were Christians, who prayed for you, who spoke a wee word.

There might have been friends who were Christians that you tried to avoid, because sometimes you may have felt uncomfortable by what they were saying, because you knew it was true, and you didn't want to face up to that.

But you know, when you look back, you're thankful for friends who cared for you, when you weren't caring for yourself. Wonderful thing.

Well, here were friends, valuable friends, friends who cared, friends who acted. What a wonderful thing. Wonderful thing, friendship in life, isn't it? You look back over your life, and you thank the Lord for good friends.

It's one of the great blessings. And you know, if you're young here today, growing up, ask the Lord to give you good friends in life. It's one of the great things in life. Good friends.

[12:59] Ask the Lord, even, I would even go further, and totally digressing here, ask young people, as they're growing up, and as they're getting older, teenagers stretching out, and the years going by, and you'll soon be into your twenties, and so on.

Ask the Lord to guide you in your relationships. Ask the Lord to provide marriage partners for you. These things, God is interested in all these things. He's sovereign in all these things.

He controls all these things. These are the great blessings in life. Salvation is the greatest blessing. But friendships, and family, and our marriage partners, and all these things are so important in life. Ask the Lord to guide you in these things. Well, anyway, here are these friends, and they were a great blessing to this man. But anyway, Jesus says, when he saw their faith, he said, man, your sins are forgiven you.

And I think when Jesus said that, that this man, although he was paralyzed, I think his sins were causing him big problems. I think it was, there was a burden in his heart, because Jesus addresses this, before he addresses the physical.

[14:16] He addresses the spiritual, and the Lord will often do that as well, because he has more interest in the spiritual, even in the physical. But he says to the man, man, your sins are forgiven.

And what a balm, that would have been to the man, before ever his body was healed, to know that his sins were forgiven. Because you know, guilt is a burden.

Guilt brings a weight upon people. If you've wronged somebody, if you did something really bad to somebody, supposing just for instance, you stole from somebody.

When you would see that passion, guilt would immediately come into your heart. You would maybe try and avoid guilt. And that's how we are before God, because we've broken his law.

And there's an inbuilt guilt. People don't realize it, or recognize it, but everybody is going around carrying guilt. And Jesus says, look, I'll take your guilt upon myself.

[15:16] That's one of the things he did upon the cross. He bore our guilt upon himself. And so he's able to say, your sins are forgiven.

And of course, when Jesus did that, when he said, your sins are forgiven, there was consternation. And the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, saying, who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone? And of course, they were mumbling away amongst themselves. And when Jesus saw their thoughts, he turned to them, and he said, I'm going to ask you a question.

Which is easier to say, your sins are forgiven, or to say, rise up and walk? Well, supposing, supposing there was somebody in the church here today who was absolutely paralyzed.

And supposing, if we could put our minds back and pretend we're there 2,000 years ago, and there we are, and Jesus is here, and he says to this person who is paralyzed, your sins are forgiven.

[16:21] And there's consternation. And Jesus then says, all right, I'm going to ask you a question. Which is easier to say, your sins are forgiven, or to say to that person who is absolutely paralyzed, rise up and walk?

Now, all of us would know which is the easier thing to say. Because in one sense, it is easy to say to someone, your sins are forgiven. Because we cannot see inside to know whether a person's sins are forgiven.

If you were to say to me, your sins are forgiven, well, I know that you cannot forgive me, my sins, any more than I can forgive you, your sins. Although that doesn't rule out that we can say to one another, if we have wronged one another, please forgive me, I'm sorry for what I did.

That's something we should do. But, and we should forgive a person like that. That's not what we're talking about here, but we're talking about our totality of our sin.

Your sins are forgiven. Well, all the people present couldn't see whether these sins were forgiven or not. Although we know they were, because that's, Jesus had the authority to do that.

[17:29] But, on one hand, it's a lot easier just to speak these words. But to say to somebody who's paralyzed, right, rise up and walk.

And the Pharisees knew which was the harder thing to do. And then Jesus, straight away after saying that, 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. Must have been quite an extraordinary moment, that.

that crowd just watching. And what, what authority and what a force and what an impact it gave to the words that Jesus had just spoken.

When he said, I forgive you your sins. And then he's really saying, as proof of what I have just said, I'm going to say to this man, rise up and walk.

[18:30] And he got up and went away. And how did he go away? He went away, rejoicing, glorifying God. That's what he did. And amazement, and they glorified God, in fact, all of them.

And amazement seized them all and they glorified God and were filled with awe. Saying, we've seen an extraordinary thing today. So you see, even these Pharisees and scribes were instantly, they were, they knew that they were in the presence of someone quite extraordinary.

they were filled with awe and glorified God. That didn't last, that impression didn't last with some of them. But we must move on, the time is going, and just look at this very, very briefly.

Then we find Jesus going on and he saw this tax collector named Levi sitting at a tax booth. And he said to him, follow me. And leaving everything, he rose and followed him.

Now as you know, this tax collector would have been a wealthy man. These tax collectors who were employed by Rome, and as you know, many of them were extortioners, they were rogues, because they used to increase taxes on their own.

[19:48] They would say to people, right, suppose, putting it in our own money, supposing somebody had to pay five pounds, they would say, right, your tax today is seven pounds. They would give Rome the five pound and they would pocket the two pound themselves.

That's put in its simplest form, and they were notorious for this, and because of that they were despised. But many of them had become very, very, very wealthy.

And so Jesus is passing by and he sees this man, Levi, sitting at his tax booth. And he said to him, follow me.

And Levi got up, right away, and followed Jesus. Now you know, it's really quite an extraordinary thing here, and I'm sure there were many people who would be scratching their heads wondering, what on earth is Levi doing?

Here's a man who's making a fortune, and he's just walking away from the whole thing, and he's gone. And there's no return. I mean, there are some jobs you could go back to.

[20 : 51] Peter, James, and John, and Andrew, and so on, they left the fishing. But it was a job that they could go back to. If things didn't work out, they could go back to. In fact, there was a day when Peter thought he was going to have to go back to the fishing.

Remember, after he had denied Jesus, he said, let's go fishing, and the language means, let's go back to the fishing. Because he thought it was over. But for Levi, walking away from the employment of Rome, walking away from us as a tax collector, there was no going back. The moment Levi got up and walked away, he walked away for good. And you know, that's what the Lord expects of us. The Lord didn't expect the disciples to go back fishing full-time. I'm sure they did go back fishing in the sense of going out now and again to fish. But they never went back as a full-time employment. They were following Jesus.

Jesus doesn't call people aside to follow him in the sense of a specific work and say, right, on you go, here you go, I want you to become a fisher of man.

[22 : 00] Leave everything else and then say, well, it's only for a wee while. God calls us. When he calls us into something, he calls us. And I believe that that is what we have here.

And so Levi, he's away and he's following the Lord Jesus. And again, it's wonderful because unleaving everything, he rose and followed him.

Jesus himself said that wealth or the pursuit of wealth, not money in and of itself. In fact, the Bible doesn't say that money is, some people will quote that and will say that money is the root of all evil. The Bible says that. The Bible doesn't say that. The Bible says that the love of money, the obsession with money, the obsession of getting money is the root of all evil.

In other words, where people will do anything in order to make money, where people will sell their own soul, where people will give as long as.

[23 : 14] and that's part of the problem in this world where so many people are exploited, so many people are trampled on, so many people are, so many people lose everything they have because of the desire of others to make wealth.

And so much of the hurt that goes on in this world is because of this very thing, the pursuit, the love of money, not money itself, but the love the pursuit of.

And Jesus said that some of the hardest people to win for the kingdom are those who are obsessed with making. So you see that this man, Levi, although it's very, it's so briefly put here, he's just sitting there, Jesus passes by and says, follow me.

Actually, Jesus is dealing with one of the hardest people to get at. but straightaway the power of these words, follow me, releases Levi from the God that he had of money and he goes straight off and follows Jesus.

And let me say in passing that the word of Jesus, follow me, spoken by himself with his authority, will release you as well today.

[24 : 34] You might be here saying, you know, I don't know what it is about me, I look around the church and I see other people and they're following the Lord. I'm not. I wouldn't mind following the Lord, but how come they are and I haven't?

Well, you ask the Lord today to speak into your heart, into your soul with these words so that the barriers that are holding you back will be broken. Maybe, in fact, the barriers have already been broken and you're looking for something else.

I believe that within our church and I believe it's through here. that there are people who are already in the kingdom and they don't realize it. They're looking for something else.

Maybe years back you entered into that kingdom, but you're still looking for something and you're not sure what. You're waiting for something dramatic to happen.

Maybe you're already in and you ask the Lord, Lord, please make clear to me. Just take away the cloud that's there so that I will come to know that peace that I should have.

[25 : 40] If I'm already in, Lord, give me, if it's assurance of faith I need, please, Lord, give me that. But if I haven't come into the kingdom, Lord, speak the word so that I today may indeed follow you.

So that's what the Lord did. He called and then we find the reaction of Levi that he makes this great feast and he invites all his previous friends to that feast.

And again, that's the reaction, the reaction of somebody who comes to faith. What they have discovered themselves, they want that others will discover as well. You don't want to say, oh, you

know, I've become a Christian, it's wonderful.

See the peace that I have in my soul. It's extraordinary this. I wish I had discovered this long ago, but I'm not going to tell anybody. I hope nobody else gets this.

No Christian feels like that. They want that others will have the very same thing. Just like the woman of Samaria, when she came to discover Jesus Christ, she couldn't wait to run through the village and tell people, come, see a man who told me all things that ever I did.

[26 : 59] Is not this Christ. That's the reaction of grace. You want others to experience the liberty, the freedom, the joy in Jesus. And so Levi is celebrating.

It's a time of celebration. And you know this, I love the way that Jesus reacts. And Jesus goes to join with those people who have experienced this liberty and this freedom.

people who have seen it. But again there's the grumblers. And the questions and the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at the disciples of Jesus saying, why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?

Remember the Pharisees, the separatists, they wouldn't be seen near them, have nothing to do with them, cross to the other side of the street and they can't get into their heads.

how come Jesus is there eating and drinking with the Pharisees, eating, sorry, with the tax collectors, with the sinners? And so they approached the disciples who are with Jesus.

[28 : 03] How come? They can't understand. And so, and they said to him, the disciples of John, Jesus answered again, those who have no need of a physician, 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. That was a real shot across the bow to the Pharisees. They thought they were righteous. They told God they were righteous.

Remember the man praying in the temple? Lord, I thank you that I'm not like other men. I thank you that I'm not like that sinner over in the corner.

Lord, do you want to hear what I do? I'm going to tell you all the good things I do. That's what he was doing. I fast twice in the week. I give. I all the things.

The Pharisees were so full of their own righteousness and Jesus is saying to them, I've got nothing for you. you're not interested in the gospel because you think your own goodness is good enough for God.

[29 : 12] Well, let me tell you it's not. But see the man I'm sitting with just now, who's celebrating his deliverance and is bringing his friends around. He is somebody who knew he was sick, who needed a physician, who needed a doctor to heal him, heal his soul.

So that's what Jesus is saying. And then the question is asked, they said the disciples of John fast often and offer prayers and so did the disciples of the Pharisees, but you eat and drink.

And Jesus said to them, can you make wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? And you see Jesus is saying here, look, I've come into this world.

And Jesus and the Bible, likens salvation to a marriage. Because that's what it is, where we are joined with Jesus.

And all the celebration of that marriage, and that is what heaven itself will be, will be in a sense an eternal celebration, a spiritual celebration, but an eternal one.

[30 : 26] And Jesus is saying, look, salvation and coming to faith, it's not a thing about gloom and doom. It's about life and about freedom and about liberty.

When you go to a wedding, you're not there in all doom and gloom. You're there to celebrate, you're there to rejoice, it's a happy occasion.

And Jesus is saying, that's why my disciples are rejoicing. That is why my disciples are eating and drinking and celebrating. it's because I am here.

Oh, there will come days, Jesus says, when the bridegroom is taken away from them. And they'll fast in those days. These were days, difficult days, and there are times where it will be difficult for the church.

But let us remember the joy that is in the gospel. Some people don't see that joy, but there is. There is a real joy.

[31 : 25] joy. And if you don't know that joy today, ask the Lord to give you that joy. Because some people, and maybe the church has opened itself to criticism of gloom, but it is not a place of gloom.

It is a place of reality. And of course there is sorrow for sin. We're not going to minimize that in any way. And every single believer in here knows the pain and the sorrow brought about by sin.

But there's also joy. And it is wrong to disguise that joy and pretend that there isn't. Maybe our culture is such that we're sometimes afraid to demonstrate our feelings of joy and our euphoria and these things.

But there is in the gospel. And that's what Jesus is going on to say. The joy that is within this gospel. You know it was C.S.

Lewis that he described salvation. his conversion in quite a remarkable way. You know how he came from really I suppose from atheism to become such an extraordinary Christian and his writings are really quite remarkable.

[32 : 41] He had such an insight and such a wonderful pen, such a wonderful ability to describe things. In fact, he's one of these writers, if you haven't read C.S.

Lewis' writings, read them because he's able to put into words sometimes what you can only think but you can't put into what you yourself, well I certainly, maybe I'm doing you a disservice, I find that and I say well I couldn't put that into words but that's what I'm kind of thinking.

It's wonderful if you can read it. But this is what he actually said where he was somebody as he said who was dragged into the kingdom by his heels, kicking and screaming.

And then he was thinking of what conversion would be like and he was bracing himself, this is what he said, bracing himself as if somebody was going to dive into a cold, a freezing cold mountain stream.

And when he dived in he found it was absolutely delightful. When we were talking about that last week, things are so different to what we think or what we thought.

[33 : 52] And C.S. Lewis was bracing himself like you're going to plunge into this freezing cold mountain stream and he hit in. Wow. It was brilliant, delightful.

My friends, that is what salvation is. It is delightful that you will come to know the Savior yourself. Let us pray.

O Lord, O God, we ask Thee to open our heart and mind that we may understand this truth, that we may see that Jesus is a Jesus who does great things for us and who fills our souls with so many blessings.

Lord, O God, we pray to deliver us from the fears that so often envelop our heart. Deliver us from the irrational fears and give us the fear of God in our heart.

Bless us, we pray, and take us all home to our homes safely. Forgive us all our sin. In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen.