

Luke 5:17-26

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[0 : 0 0] There is a crack in everything. Our text this morning is a familiar one to many of us, I think. And there's a reason why.

Because this is one of those texts where we get to see down clearly through the crack in everything down into the heart of what's gone wrong and what we need to fix it.

In fact, it looks down even into the struggles of our own heart. So I want to approach this text very simply with two main points.

We see in this text that Jesus reveals your greatest need and Jesus answers your greatest doubt. So let's dive in. First, Jesus reveals your greatest need.

Look with me again at verse 17. On one of the verses, the 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 church with him to heal. So here is Jesus.

[1 : 0 2] He's beginning to sort of catch the attention at this early stage of his ministry. Now the attention is sort of going broader to the religious leaders and the religious authorities. And they've gathered around to hear him teach.

Then verse 17. 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. What exactly, friends, do you think your greatest need is?

I think we can guess pretty clearly what this man thought his was. It's obvious to anyone who met him, right? He was paralyzed. He couldn't walk.

And think how massively that effect would have affected his whole life. Economically, in an agricultural society, of course, he couldn't work. He would have been utterly dependent on others for economic support.

[2 : 0 9] Socially, his paralysis, without a doubt, affected where he could go, who he could spend time with, who maybe was even comfortable to spend time with him. Relationally, it's possible that it meant he would maybe never marry, never have a family.

And emotionally, psychologically, it must have been a crushing burden. His disability filling him at times with despair, at other times angry. And emotionally, at other times angry. Picture yourself standing there with them, peering down through the hole you just dug through some guy's roof.

There you are, standing with them, peering down through the hole. You see the crowd jammed into the house. And Jesus looks up at you, and he looks at your friend, and he opens his mouth, and you know he's going to say it.

Rise and walk. He's going to say it. Rise and walk. Man, your sins are forgiven you.

And I imagine at that moment, the house went silent. And your buddy up on the roof with you, jabs you in the side and whispers, did he just say your sins are forgiven?

[3 : 44] Now, what must be going through their minds at this moment? What's going through your mind as you stare down at Jesus? I imagine partially, it must have been something like this.

Well, Jesus, that's quite a nice thing to say. But we were hoping you might be able to do something about, well, you see, he is paralyzed after all. Did you notice the bed?

We were thinking you might do something about his legs. But in this moment, Jesus is revealing something, not just to these friends, but to all of us.

No matter what you face in life, no matter what trials or troubles you face, your greatest need, friends, is the forgiveness of sins. Now, don't get me wrong.

God certainly cares about all of your other problems, and needs as well. And one day, he will make everything right. Don't we see a picture of that all over Jesus's ministry? But here, we're being graciously shown our deepest, greatest, most pernicious need.

[4 : 57] Imagine going to the doctor because for the last week or two, you've just had this nasty cough that won't go away. And it's affecting your work, and it's affecting your mood, and it's making everything just miserable.

And so your doctor does a chest x-ray and discovers that sure enough, you've got a nasty case of pneumonia. But the images also happen to show something else. Something you weren't looking for, but it's clearly there on the screen.

All around your lungs, your heart, even your spine. And the doctor says, we'll get you something for your cough, but your greatest need right now, we're sorry to say, is that your body is full of cancer, and we have to act immediately.

And friends, that is all of our condition, spiritually speaking. Now, of course, we have trouble believing that the forgiveness of sins is our greatest need, don't we?

Like that persistent, irritating cough, all of our other problems are just so much more in our face. They're just so much more inconvenient. But if we pause and consider what Jesus is telling us here, it is true, is it not?

[6 : 16] Why is the forgiveness of sins our greatest need? Well, think first. First, because sin runs deeper.

If you go back to Genesis 3, you see that when sin enters the world, it breaks everything. It's the problem under all the problems. Our relationship to one another, our relationship to the created world around us, our relationship even to ourselves, all of these become broken.

All of these are not the way they're supposed to be, because sin deep down has broken our relationship with God. Sin runs deeper. It's the problem under all the problems.

Now, what are we not saying here? We're not saying that there's always a one-to-one connection between some specific sin in your life and some specific problem.

Note that this man in Luke chapter 5 is not paralyzed because he committed some particular sin. That's not how it works. However, however, the reason we live in a world where there are things like paralysis and joblessness and loneliness, the reason why all these things afflict us is because the world has fallen.

[7 : 36] The problem of sin runs deeper. It's down underneath them all. And fixing all those other problems won't actually solve this one.

When I was in high school, I thought that if I could just fix the problem of not having a driver's license, my life would be radically better.

Just think of the freedom I would know. No longer waiting for my mom to pick me up with our dopey brown station wagon. I would drive the dopey brown station wagon.

And I would take out all the seats in the middle and I would pile my friends in. And sheer unending bliss would be the result. And of course, once I got my driver's license, I realized it wasn't so.

It's a trite example, I know, but haven't you seen that to be true in much greater areas of your life? You get the job, but you still struggle with a sense of purpose. You get the spouse, but you still wrestle with loneliness.

[8 : 48] You get the fame, but it doesn't take away your insecurity. You get the health, but your body still deteriorates and your end will still come.

There's something deeper that's wrong with us. There's something deeper that needs to be put right. But the problem of sin not only runs deeper, it also lasts longer.

I wonder how long this man and Luke had been confined to his bed. Do you think five years? Do you think maybe 10 years? Had his entire adult life been one of paralysis?

And yet friends, the truth is that the alienation from God that sin brings won't last just 70, 80, or even 90 years.

It will last for eternity. Sin is a problem with eternal consequences because it is an offense against an eternal God.

[10 : 02] But third, sin not only runs deeper and lasts longer, sin also costs more. And here's what I mean by that.

I mean that sin keeps us from our greatest joy. You and I were created not just to have whole bodies and loving relationships and meaningful work.

You and I were created friends to have fellowship with God. Picture it. From all eternity, God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit encompassing one another in perfect love and joy.

Three in one. One in three. And like a great symphony pouring out of the concert hall doors and into the streets, God made us to enter into His company.

To have our hearts full of His music. To know that love and joy and to reflect it into the world with our own part to play. Friends, God made us to know Him.

[11 : 07] To know Him who is perfect in every way. Without limit and without reserve. The one who is not just the cause and the source of all joy, but the one who is very joy itself.

Do you see why the forgiveness of sins is our greatest need? Do you see why Jesus reveals this to us? Because it's possible to have every earthly joy and yet to lose fellowship with joy itself.

Let me make one application before moving to our second main point and the rest of the passage. Friends, I wonder if you can see yourself in this man's experience. If so, do you see how God can use some difficulty in your life to get down to something much deeper?

This man's paralysis opens the window to Jesus' forgiveness in his life. And not just his life, but the lives of those around him.

Would his friends ever have brought him to Jesus had he been able to walk? Would he have ever realized his need? Of course, his disability wasn't in itself a good thing.

[12 : 36] The things that are wrong with our world aren't in themselves good. And one day, God will eradicate all of them. But until that day, God is able to use them.

He's able to take them and to use them and to show us our deepest needs. And ultimately, through them, to bring about our eternal good. This week, Greg was telling me about a talk he attended last week with David Brooks, the New York Times columnist.

And Brooks was saying how he's interviewed a lot of people, asking them, what are the major things in your life that have really shaped you? Or what are the events that have really forged you in a meaningful way? And perhaps not surprisingly, he found that no one talks about that wonderful vacation to Hawaii.

or that delightful getaway in the mountains. Those weren't the events that had a life-shaping, life-transforming effect. No, most of the time, it's the hard things that change and shape us.

It's difficult things that open us up in a way that nothing will. So friends, I know this sounds very strange, but don't squander your hardships.

[13 : 58] It's so easy to just get angry and to just grow bitter and to just want to get it over with as quickly as possible. And know, to be sure, God in his mercy hears all of your cries, but also seek and ask God, what are you showing me through this?

What are you teaching me? What are you forging in me in and through this experience? This could be the window God uses to open up a whole new depth of knowing him, a whole new depth of heart change, a whole new means of reaching those around you.

You know, we often think if this or that problem were fixed, then I could get on with my life and follow God and serve Jesus. But actually, friends, this may be your moment when God is ready to do his greatest work through you.

You may not get the physical healing this man got, but God still might be in the process of radically transforming you nonetheless. So this passage reveals our greatest need, the forgiveness of sins.

But second, it also reveals our greatest doubt. Look again at verse 21. And the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, saying, who is this who speaks blasphemies?

[15 : 25] 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 you or to say 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. Now the Pharisees, of course, are completely correct.

Only God can forgive sins. Why? Because sin, properly speaking, is vertical. It is rejecting and rebelling against God, our creator.

Imagine a married couple sitting down with a counselor and they sit down and they just start to pour out their grievances against each other. He did this, she did this, oh yeah, he does this, oh yeah, well she does this.

And this goes on for 15 minutes, 20 minutes. And then finally, when they begin to quiet down, the counselor looks at the wife and looks at the husband and says, I've heard your complaints and I want you to know I forgive you.

[16 : 43] They're going to find another counselor, right? Something is fundamentally wrong with that picture. Of course, he or she, that counselor, doesn't have the right to forgive.

They're not the offended party. And friends, when it comes to our sin, our offense against God, yes, it might have effects that go all across horizontally, but the forgiveness of sin, only God has the authority, the right to forgive those.

Which means that Jesus' claim here in Luke 5 is simply and undeniably radical. In this moment, he has closed off from us so many of the explanations that we want to or that we try to put on him.

A great teacher, we think. Perhaps even a great miracle worker. But Jesus has just declared the authority to forgive sins.

And who can forgive sins but God alone? Do you see how Jesus is driving us into a corner here, friends? He's pushing us up against the doubt, the question that is the most important one of all.

[17 : 59] Does this man, Jesus, have the authority to forgive my sins? Can he be the answer to my greatest need?

And if so, what does that mean about who this man truly is? Of course, the Pharisees here dismiss the possibility immediately.

Only God can forgive sins and they also happen to know where and how God forgives sins. Thank you very much. God forgives sins at the temple through the sacrificial system. You see, the Pharisaical mindset has everything under control.

I do my best to keep the law and when I mess up, I take care of things at the temple. Who doesn't need a little forgiveness every now and then after all? No one's perfect.

So I do my duty, I perform my sacrifices, and I take care of it. But you see, they failed to see the real point of the sacrificial system at the temple. That whole business was meant to point beyond itself.

[19 : 06] After all, how could the sacrifice of a mere animal put sinful human beings right before a holy God? And doesn't the fact that those sacrifices have to be repeated year after year after year show that they were insufficient for the task?

No, friends. The temple was a signpost that God set up of something greater to come. It was a signal, it was a sign, it was a pointer that God would come and do something in the future to put us right once and for all.

But the Pharisees can't see it. And so often we miss it too, don't we? We think we have everything under control.

I'll do my best. And when I mess up, I'll go to church and take care of it. After all, no one's perfect. But we fail to see how serious sin actually is.

We don't have it under control. It isn't something we can just handle with a little church attendance here and a few good works there. It isn't a cough.

[20 : 15] It's a cancer. It's down in your bones and you need to be rescued. And only God can forgive. Well, okay, we think.

So the Pharisees had it wrong trying to control God. But why can't God just forgive? I mean, if he is good, why doesn't he just say the word and forgive our sins?

Why is there any need for Jesus? But then again, friends, does anyone just say the word when they truly forgive? Isn't forgiveness always costly?

If I borrow your copy of Luther's commentary on Galatians because, hey, it is the 500th anniversary of the Reformation after all, why not catch up on a little Reformation reading?

If I borrowed your prized copy of Luther's commentary on Galatians and I carelessly drop it into the bathtub, utterly ruining it, there are really only two options, right?

[21 : 22] Either I pay to replace the book or you forgive me and you absorb the cost. But either way, someone pays.

Someone bears the cost of the wrong. And that's true even when the offense is much more serious. If a son says hurtful or untrue things about his father, ruins his reputation, breaks his heart, what are the options?

Either the father can make the son pay, I'll write him out of my will, I'll tell everyone what a selfish ingrate he is at every opportunity I get. Or the father can absorb the cost of the wrong.

He can bear the pain in himself and he can forgive. You see, friends, no one just forgives, no one just says the word. Someone pays the cost. But now in verses 23 and 24 of our passage, it looks like Jesus does just say the word.

Which is easier to say? Your sins are forgiven or to say rise and walk? But 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. Now, of course, it's easier to say your sins are forgiven you because there's no way of seeing whether or not it actually worked, right?

[22 : 45] That's Jesus' point here. The rise and walk, that one's a little easier to verify. So as a sign of his authority to say and do the former, Jesus says and does the latter.

To prove he has authority to forgive sins, he heals the man of his paralysis. But we've got to push a little deeper than that, don't we? What gives Jesus the authority to speak that word of forgiveness with such ease?

Man, I say to you, your sins are forgiven. Of course, Jesus is making a point about who he is. Fully human, yes, but also fully God, but there's more.

Jesus can speak this word with such ease. He can pronounce forgiveness with just a word, not just because of who he is, but because of what he's come to do. Forgiveness is always costly.

And that's exactly what we see as Luke's gospel unfolds. Jesus, the one who came proclaiming freedom for the captives will himself be bound.

[23 : 59] He himself will be betrayed and he will give himself up to be pinned to death on a cross. Our sins will be laid upon him and he will absorb their cost in full once and for all.

Something that no mere sacrifice could ever do. And three days later, he will rise and he will appear to his disciples and he will give them no surprise, this message.

Go into all the nations and proclaim the forgiveness of sins in my name. How can Jesus say the word of forgiveness to this man in Luke 5?

What gives him the right to declare that our sins are forgiven? And what gives the church today the right to continue to speak this word of forgiveness in his name to all who put their trust in him?

It's because Jesus, very God and very man, has done what no one else has or can do. he died for our sins and rose again for our justification.

[25 : 09] Friends, Jesus has the authority to forgive your sins. To speak the word of forgiveness that we need to hear.

Now, as we apply this to our lives, do you know what it's like to hear that word? Maybe you're not so sure you need it. Maybe you're new to Christian things.

Maybe a friend invited you along this morning. But take a look here at verse 25. And immediately the man rose up before them, picked up what he had been lying on and went home glorifying God.

And amazement seized them all and they glorified God and were filled with all saying, we have seen extraordinary things today. This man's physical healing is a window into what his spiritual healing was like.

He could rise. He could walk. And most of all, he could glorify God. Something had been put right with him and the God who made him such that now his relationship was one of wonder and praise.

[26 : 18] Something had been released. A key had been turned. And now he knew real freedom and real joy. You see, friends, when Jesus shows us our need for the forgiveness of sins and when we see his rightful authority to actually forgive them, the results can be surprising.

Of course, it can feel differently for different people. The English writer Francis Buford describes it this way. He says, what does it feel like to feel yourself forgiven?

In my experience, he says, it's like a toothache stopping because a tooth has been removed. It has the numb surprisingness of something that hurt not being there anymore.

For some, it's a flood of joy. For others, it's the quiet relief of a long-standing ache finally going away. One that you had grown so accustomed to, you thought it was just part of life.

the way things worked finally being let go. But underneath all of these experiences, it's the reality of being put right with God.

[27 : 36] Have you experienced this? Do you know this joy, this relief? Jesus offers it to everyone who comes to him in faith and trust.

You don't need to dig a hole through a roof. You just need to go to him in prayer. The word of forgiveness stands ready for you today if you will turn and trust in him.

But second, if Jesus has the authority to forgive sins, it means that we should not only trust him for ourselves, but we should also eagerly take others to him as well.

Look again at verses 18 and 19. Look at the length to which these friends will go in order to bring their friend to Jesus. They dug a hole through a stranger's roof. And why did they do it?

What gave them the courage and the perseverance and the somewhat insanity to actually do that? Because they knew Jesus could help.

[28 : 39] They had heard the reports. They had maybe even met some of the people that Jesus had healed. And how much more, friends, can we have that same confidence today because we know him not just to be a teacher and not just to be a healer, but we know him to be the risen Lord.

Why don't I invite my friends to lunch and ask some spiritual questions? Why don't I give that Christian book to my neighbor who I've been spending time with? Why don't I invite my roommate to come to church?

Friends, if Jesus does have the authority to forgive sins, then surely we can be confident that he is exactly who our friends need to meet, no matter what it takes to get him there.

And you might need to take the long road around. You might have to climb a building or two. You might have to circumvent a doubt or two. But no matter how patient or how resourceful we need to be, we can be confident that Jesus can and does meet us in our need.

He has the authority to forgive sins. So friends, take this message with you. Our greatest need has been met and our greatest doubt has been answered.

[29 : 55] Jesus has the authority to forgive sins. The crack in everything is being mended. Though we are sinners, in Jesus we can be declared right with God.

So like these people in this passage, glorify him with all and let no crowd keep you from coming to him. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, we are thankful and we are humbled by the fact that you have come and you have declared the forgiveness of our sins. Help us to embrace this deep down in our hearts so that we too might glorify you with all and know the freedom that it brings.

Amen. Amen.