

The Full Authority of the Son of Man, Part 1

Luke 5:21-26

Luke chapter 5 starting in 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 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, before Jesus. And when he saw their faith, he said, "Man, your sins are forgiven you."

When that paralytic was lowered into the room, hot, stuffy, packed house, room full of people. There was a large delegation that day of skeptical Jewish leaders. They had come from the Jewish religious establishment. There were many other onlookers there as well, they, some that were there really just to see the controversy that might stir up with Jesus being with them.

But also some others there to see Jesus himself, to hear his teaching, to see what they might see about his miraculous power to heal. And when those four faithful men lowered their paralyzed friend into the room right in front of Jesus, Jesus took one look and he saw their faith and he pronounced on that man the fulfillment of Gospel promise. "Man," Friend, you might better translate it, "your sins are forgiven you."

Because we understand New Testament doctrine and how the New Testament unpacks what happened that day, we realize that that, what he said there, that pronouncement, is an acknowledgment that the greatest miracle of all had happened. It started with regeneration by the Holy Spirit. It led to repentance and saving faith. It resulted in justification, a declaration by God that that man is justified, forgiven of his sin. It was an incredible proclamation. And it really took the air out of the room as everybody was stopped short, expecting one thing and seeing something that frankly perplexed them.

The greatest point in the narrative comes in the second half of the narrative, starting with the skeptical thoughts of the scribes and the Pharisees there in verse 21 and take a look. Notice their reaction, "The scribes and the Pharisees began to

question, saying, 'Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?'"

The tension that was caused by the interruption of this paralyzed man and his four friends, that tension had been resolved when Jesus absolved the man of his sin. But as Jesus' words, as they started to settle on the people who were there, settle on the spectators, the implications of what he had just said created an entirely new kind of tension. This was a deeply theological tension that got down into their hearts about what they believed and did not believe; caused by the presence of someone they had never seen before.

Jesus' words, his teaching, his actions, his behavior, they did not have any category to put this man in. The tension that we see here with this holy person in the midst of an unholy roomful of people, his presence there forced the decision about the nature, the identity, and the claims of Jesus Christ. And that's what Jesus intended. What Jesus is forcing this roomful of people to consider, what he presses them to acknowledge, is the full authority of the Son of Man.

So with that in mind, let's look at the first point in our outline for today, which is this point, Jesus confronts sinful deduction. Jesus confronts sinful deduction. Let's look at verse

21 a little more closely because it really gives us some insight into how these religious leaders were thinking, how they were processing what they had just witnessed with Jesus forgiving this man. "The scribes and the Pharisees," again, verse 21, "began to question, saying, 'Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?'"

There's a sense in which the scribes and the Pharisees are not altogether wrong here, are they? I mean they're not, they're wrong in the judgment they've made, the conclusion that they've come to, but they did have the right starting point. We want to acknowledge that right from the beginning.

But what we see emerge from the right starting point to their sinful deduction, what becomes clear is this, that their, their sinful hearts are really revealed here in their sinful reasoning. And that sinful reasoning, that deduction, that process of deduction, leads them to a sinful conclusion. What they deduce about Jesus, the conclusion that they come to, it's not going to result in salvation for these men. They're cutting off from themselves the only hope of eternal life, which is Jesus Christ in front of them. So this is very, very serious.

The scribes, the same group there that Luke, Luke introduced us to in verse 17 is, as law teachers, scholars. They're the law experts, they're the scribes and the Pharisees there and they represent the theological and popular leadership of Israel. These men are men of great influence. And as we said, their starting point was sound. Their question was even reasonable. And if they'd stopped there, they would have been fine. For example, if they had simply said, "Who is this?" And then had they said, "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" And that's all they had said, they would have been on the right track because forgiveness is exclusively a divine, a divine prerogative, right? Only God can forgive sins.

Even David, when he confessed the matter of his sin in his adultery with Bathsheba, Psalm 51, you remember that? You can also read about it in 2 Samuel chapter 11 and 12, but remember that sin of adultery with Bathsheba, that involved a lot of other sins as well, including deception, conspiracy to commit murder, actual murder, getting a guy drunk, conspiracy to cover it up, conspiracy to deceive the entire kingdom, but when David confessed that sin in Psalm 51, he prayed this, Psalm 51:4, "Against you and you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight." How could he say that?

After all that he had done, after all the consequences spilling out of that sin, how could he say, "Against you and you alone have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight?" Well, that's because God is the lawgiver. And he's the only lawgiver. And every sin that David had committed in that whole endeavor, which not only was the adultery, but everything spilling out after that and all the cover-up of the birth and everything else. I mean it lasted over a year. All of that, every single sin involved in that, no one but God gave the laws about those things.

All sin is a violation of God's holy standard, not man's standards. It wasn't Bathsheba or Uriah who gave laws about adultery, that was God's law and David sinned against it. It wasn't Joab, the commander of the armies who gave laws about murder and deception and fair play, God gave all those laws. David sinned against those laws. The consequences abounded most certainly, terrible consequences, lasting consequences. David's sin hurt many, many other people. David's sin defiled many people. It sullied the entire kingdom, got somebody killed.

Technically speaking, God is the one, theologically speaking, God is the only one against whom sin was committed. Because God, not man, gave the laws that David violated. And

that means God and God alone is the only one who has the right to forgive sins. Listen, that's why none of us, none of us, beloved, has the right to withhold forgiveness from other people who have sinned against us. Even though God is the one against whom we sin, in an ultimate sense, we must ultimately reconcile with him first and fundamentally. It is a right thing when we commit sin that hurts another human being, it is right for us to go to that person, confess our sin, ask that person to forgive us. As James says, James 5:16, "Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed."

And if you've been hurt or offended by someone else's sin, you must forgive. You have no right whatsoever to withhold forgiveness from other people. In fact, as Jesus often taught, and most pointedly from Matthew 18:21-35, if you don't forgive, it's an indication that you may not be a Christian at all. If God offers you the complete and total remission of the sins you've committed against his standards, against his law, against his holiness, he's offered you complete and total remission of those sins and then you refuse to forgive your fellow man, in his anger, God will hand you over to the jailers until you should pay all your debt.

Which is an unpayable debt, by the way, because every sin from the smallest to the greatest is a sin against an eternal being, so every sin has an eternal consequence. You can never repay it. That's why hell is eternal. And Jesus said he'll, God will hand you over to the jailers if you don't forgive. "So also my heavenly Father will do to every single one of you," Matthew 18:35, "if you do not forgive your brother," and get this, "from the heart." Not just speaking it, not just an external show, but from the heart where only God can see.

This is serious, this matter of forgiveness. And the scribes are correct about the principle, about the seriousness of it. They're biblical scholars. These guys are careful theologians. They got this right. They had the correct theological starting point, namely that forgiveness is exclusively a divine prerogative. And they asked the right question to follow up from that, "Who is this?" Literally, Who, who is this man, who is this one? They were stymied about Jesus, that's understandable.

I mean, who of us is not overawed and perplexed by Jesus Christ? Every time we read the Gospels we're just puzzled and have to learn and understand. Sometimes, what is he talking about? Why did he do that when I expected this? Look, they



didn't stop with the principles of good theology. They didn't stop with admitting their perplexity about Jesus Christ. They went further. They came to a sinful conclusion in their hearts.

In fact, I'll speculate here, I think it's justified by the context. I think these scribes and Pharisees entered the room that day with their conclusions already in hand. I think their minds were pretty well made up. And I say that because their deductions were not based on necessary inference from what they saw in front of them. Their conclusions had been predetermined by a prejudiced starting point. They were already biased against him. In other words, they, they came to Capernaum ready to conclude what they already had determined. That this man is not to be trusted.

That's how Luke recorded it, too. They lead with their conclusion here, "He is speaking blasphemies." And then they followed up with their theological justification, "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" There was nothing restraining their judgment. Their heart was unbound. Nothing to keep them from concluding that Jesus is here a blasphemer, which is exactly the opposite of what they should've have concluded. This is an unbiased reasoning here, not in any sense. This is a sinful deduction on their part, and Jesus confronts it head on. Look at

verse 22, "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?'"

Now, as the readers of Luke's Gospel, we are given here a very privileged perspective, from our vantage point, we not only see how the religious leaders here were sinful in their reasoning, but Luke, he also shows us here an insight into the deity of Jesus Christ. And notice he doesn't just tell us Jesus is divine. It's not just a propositional statement. He records the facts in such way, such a way we can't avoid coming to that conclusion for ourselves. I mean if we take this seriously, that's all we can conclude, is that Jesus is divine.

Look at the way verse 21 reads. You, you might be tempted to think that the scribes and the Pharisees, they're reasoning out loud, like they're questioning, and their questions and comments are coming out loud, and Jesus overhears it. They weren't. In verse 21, we're reading about their thoughts, not their spoken words. Two indications of that there, come in verse 22, "Jesus perceived their thoughts," it says, and then also he asked them, "Why do you question in your hearts?" It's pretty clear here, he's reading their minds. Mark's gospel confirms

that by saying in Mark 2:6, “Some of the scribes were sitting there questioning in their hearts.”

So, we need to understand that’s where the questioning is taking place. This is internal reasoning. And to make that fact plain to us, as Luke writes it, he has kept this part of the scene connected by threading it together with the same word and it’s the verb *dialogizomai*. The ESV translates it in verse 21, as to, to question, but more foundationally, what’s going on here, the word means to think, to reason, to consider, to ponder.

First and foremost, this is something that happens internally. This is internal reasoning. There are times, in certain contexts when the word is used to refer to something that, that is known on the outside, but when it’s used to refer to something that moves from internal pondering to external, outside reasoning, something discussed out loud, something you could actually hear and listen to. In those cases, when the word is used in those contexts, the word *dialogizomai* refers to discussing the matter in great detail. It tells us about a rather lengthy exchange, like some kind of an open debate where there’s a back-and-forth argument. That’s clearly not happening here in this context.

The scribes and the Pharisees, according to what Luke tells us here, they had just begun to question, to reason, to question and think about things in their hearts. And then in verse 22, when Jesus turned to address them openly, you know what he was doing? He was exposing their thinking. Can you imagine sitting in that room, and you're the one asking those questions about Jesus? You're the ones coming to that conclusion, and he talks about what's in your heart and exposes it to everybody else? You're looking around the room like, is anybody else seeing this? Am I the only, is he talking about me?

They had just begun to question, so he's exposing their thinking. You may recall at this point back in chapter 2 of Luke, Simeon's words to Mary in the temple court that this one, "this child in your arms," he's gonna be one that God uses, that "the thoughts from many hearts may be revealed." That's happening already right here in this text right now. A sword of division is cutting into their thinking, filleting them open and opening up their hearts to everybody else. So, having perceived their thoughts, which is the word *dialogismos*, the same root word, having perceived their internal reasoning, he asked them, "Why are you *dialogizomai*? Why are you questioning in your hearts" same word again. See how Luke has threaded this together so we cannot come to any other conclusion?

And this had to be unnerving for these guys, right? This is just unsettling to have someone expose your thinking to the outside. But don't miss the fact, Jesus isn't here embarrassing them. He's not even like overtly indicting them for their thinking. Before Jesus demonstrates his own prerogative to forgive sin, he's even answering their question by reading their hearts. They said, "Who but God alone?"

Listen, if forgiving sin is exclusively a divine prerogative, and it is, what about omniscience? Isn't that a divine attribute? Didn't he just teach them something? The basis of their judgment against him is that they believe he's not God, and he has said something that only God has the right to say, but now he has just done something that only God can do. He's read their minds and he's exposed their thinking to everybody in the room.

You will remember that God told Samuel, "The Lord sees not as man sees." The word translated, Lord, in 1 Samuel 16:7 is the divine name Yahweh. So, Yahweh told Samuel, "Yahweh sees not as man sees. Man looks on the outward appearance." It's not a judgment against us, it's just what we can do. We can't see anything on the inside. We look on the outward appearance. Man

looks on the outward appearance, but Yahweh, Yahweh looks on the heart. So, Jesus has just done something very Yahweh-like.

Each one of the scribes and the Pharisees knows it. Jesus has invaded their private thoughts. He's exposed their hidden thinking, their sinful thinking, and he's revealed it openly. But he didn't just reveal their sinful deduction, he confronted it directly. He dealt with it head on, and, in fact, he, he clarifies the real nature of their question in verse 23. He says, "Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Rise and walk?'" Again, by asking that question, Jesus is here showing mercy. He's showing grace because he's challenging them here to reason differently, to forsake their sinful reasoning and to reason correctly, to reason righteously.

There are only two ways to answer the question that he posed in verse 23, and how you answer depends on your perspective, human or divine. It depends on the resources and the power you have at your disposal, whether human or divine. If you're a man, if you're a creature with creaturely limitations, you know you have no power to make a paralytic walk. So to answer Jesus' question, a man has to answer the question and think about it this way. Well, it's much easier to say, "Your

sins are forgiven you” because that’s something you don’t have to prove.

But notice that even to come to that and say that, to admit that, that assumes a bit of duplicity on your part, right? And here’s where Jesus is exposing yet another sin that they are committing. He’s revealing something in their heart. Without any evidence, the scribes and the Pharisees are here assuming that Jesus is just saying the easy thing, that he is saying something that no one in the room can prove or test. And they’re essentially here accusing him in their hearts of being a deceiver, being a false teacher, trying to deceive the people in the room by claiming to forgive a man, something that no one could prove one way or another.

A righteous man wouldn’t say that, would it, would he? Your sins are forgiven you; no one would say that if you’re righteous. You wouldn’t even dare. You wouldn’t dare to say, Rise and walk, either because you, you know that’s impossible. You’d be proven false right away, right? So righteous man would avoid both statements. You wouldn’t utter either one of those things, but for a sinful man, someone who wants to deceive, he may very well speak the unprovable thing, the untestable thing

to deceive other people. That's what the scribes here are insinuating about Jesus. Can you believe it?

Jesus though, he's no mere man. He's not an unrighteous man, either. He's utterly unique and as the God-man, both statements are easy for him to say. To the Almighty God, all acts are effortless. Nothing he does involves the depletion of any energy. The omnipotence of his divine nature means comparisons like hard and easy, utterly meaningless. Forgiving sins, though it is a far more complex, far more costly endeavor, though it involves the greatest of all paradoxes, that a holy God can justify a sinful creature, there's no true effort involved for an Almighty God. In a very real sense forgiving sins is just as easy as healing a paralyzed man. It's not a matter of effort, it's a matter of divine wisdom, solving this great paradox.

By Jesus' omniscience and by this provocative question that forces the people in the room to wrestle with divine omnipotence and also to reveal their own hearts, Jesus here, he has confronted the sinful deduction of these religious leaders, along with everybody else in the room. Don't miss the mercy. Don't miss the mercy in this confrontation. As I said, he's not trying to embarrass them. He's even not overtly at this point



trying to indict them, even though his words are, as their thoughts are revealed, they are embarrassing. He didn't have to bother with them, did he? He wasn't obligated at all to show mercy, to answer their, their mental objections, but he confronted it anyway. Why? Because he loved them. Because he cared and also to make a larger point to the entire crowd.

That's point one. Look at point two. Jesus clarifies here sound instruction. He clarifies some sound instruction. From Jesus' perspective, healing this man's paralysis is really kind of incidental to the larger point that he intended to make. It's not that he's cold, calculating, doesn't care about this man and his paralysis. He does care. In fact, he went and healed the deeper issue first. He pronounced the forgiveness of sins, which ensures eternal life, heaven with God forever, apart from the presence and power of sin, no longer to struggle with it. That's the greater, he showed greater love already. He cared about his paralysis, that's part of the point here, but what happens next it's really a dramatic sermon illustration to clarify his teaching.

Let's back up to verse 22 again, and we'll start reading from there, "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 turned and 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."

It's important to note here that this is the heart of the narrative. This is the main point that Luke wants us to see here. It's the central focus of the other parallel accounts as well. Matthew and Mark each draw attention to precisely the same point, and that's because it was Jesus' main point in performing the miracle. The purpose of healing the man's paralysis wasn't primarily about showing compassion. It wasn't primarily because he felt for the guy who couldn't walk around and, and, and support his own weight. It was about demonstrating the fullness, the absolute, unqualified fullness of his authority.

You can see there at the beginning of verse 24 there is a purpose clause. Jesus commanded the paralyzed man to get up and go home for the purpose of making this larger theological point, namely, that they "might know for certain that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." It's the same thing that accords with Luke's purpose in writing this to Theophilus.

He says, "I want you to know with certainty about the things you have been taught about Christ."

Here we see the same, this or, it falls right in line with Christ's purpose. "I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." Why does he want them to know that? Is it a matter of being in love with principles? No. He wants them to know he has authority to forgive sins. Why? Because he wants to define forgiveness of sins. It's all a demonstration here of the mercy and the compassion and the kindness of our God revealed in Jesus Christ.