

The Greatest Miracle of All, Part 2

Luke 5:17-20

You can picture the scene, Mark tells us that the place was packed, Mark 2:2, "Many were gathered together so that there was no more room, not even at the door. And Jesus was preaching the word to them." So that's the occasion. It was an occasion here for significant influence. Impress the Pharisees and law experts, you had it made, offend them, you're relegated to the outside. So all Jesus needed now was to impress them, which should be pretty easy, right?

This is for Jesus, point two, an opportunity for power. An opportunity for power. Look at verse 17 again. That last sentence at the end of the verse, very important detail in Luke's attempt to set the scene up for us. Pharisees and the teachers of the law were sitting there, "And the power of the Lord was with him to heal." So in light of the context, you need to see the significance of that. Jesus is teaching, Pharisees and seminary professors are all sitting there. They're deciding how to cast their votes. And Jesus just happens to have the power of the Lord with him to heal. Perfect. Jesus had an opportunity to demonstrate divine power. He had the opportunity

to win the affirmation of the most influential body of delegates in all of Jewish society.

He's presented with an opportunity for massive influence here. All the important religious leaders are there listening to his amazing teaching, they're scrutinizing every word. And they know, because they've studied, they know without a doubt that he is the most precise, most accurate, most profound, most learned teacher they've ever heard. These men had been through the books, these men know the questions that most of us never even think to ask. And as they're scrutinizing Jesus' teaching, they can't find him putting a word wrong. He doesn't need an editor, like most of us do. His teaching is unparalleled. Just one miracle will seal the deal. And he just happens to have the power of the Lord with him to do that very thing.

We don't know what that was like. It's a mystery to us, incomprehensible. We have no idea how he knew, no way to describe the sensation that he had, but Jesus knew, on this occasion that the power of the Lord was with him to heal. And that also meant that Jesus knew if he sensed the power of the Lord with him to heal, well that kind of gave him a clue that there would be an opportunity to perform a healing work.

At some point, he had to be expecting some kind of providential divine interruption into his teaching ministry. He's thinking, when's it gonna come? So there he was, before an attentive crowd, the presence of the religious establishment, heightening the tension there. He's teaching before a packed house, with the power to heal in his hip pocket. He's got a round chambered, the hammers pulled back, all he needs to do is pull that trigger. All he needed is someone to heal.

After healing somebody this religious delegation, go back wherever they came, Galilee, Judea, Jerusalem, they'd all give a glowing report of unqualified affirmation, unqualified approval. This is the Messiah we've been waiting for, everybody get on board. What would be perfect at this very moment, is to encounter someone who is in desperate need, right? What would really put his power on display is to heal somebody who is beyond the hope of any human doctor, someone who is so completely and so totally disabled, that only the power of the Lord could heal, that would create the most significant impression on these religious leaders.

I say that because that's the way we tend to think of this, that's not the way Jesus thought about this. He had no thought whatsoever of catering to the religious establishment. He didn't

intend to perform to the crowd, but note, that's exactly what God provided, verse 18, look there. "Behold, some men were bringing on a bed, a man who was paralyzed." We don't know much about the man, actually we know hardly anything at all. But Matthew and Mark use the popular term, *paralytikon*, paralytic. They call him a paralytic, which refers to the symptom rather than, than the condition. That's how people commonly tend to think of these people, they gave them a label, we understand that we give people labels all the time. But Luke, as a physician, he uses more medically precise language here, he notes that the man was paralyzed. And that indicates that the cause of that paralyzed condition is something else.

By the time these guys arrive, they can't find a way into the house. Behold, some men were bringing on a bed a man who was paralyzed and actually, we find out in Mark that there were four of them carrying this bed. They were seeking to bring him in and lay him before Jesus. But verse 19, "Finding no way to bring him in because of the crowd. They went up on the roof, let him down with his bed through the tiles into the midst before Jesus."

Again, exhausting work. Before they could execute their little plan to lower this guy through the roof. They had to make some quick modifications to the man's bed. The word for bed in

verse 18 is *kline*. And that doesn't refer to a lightweight mat. There's actually another word for that. This word refers to the larger, more comfortable bed, like a more cumbersome and heavier bed, it would keep this guy comfortable laying down and they're hefting that around as they walk through the city, as they come to the door, as they lift him up onto the roof.

But instead of trying to squeeze that whole thing through that small opening in the roof, they needed to reduce the size of that bed. And so that's what we see. Because in verse 19, Luke tells us he was lowered not a *kline* but on a *klinidan* which is the diminutive term, it's now become a little bed. It's become a stretcher. They've chopped that thing up.

So having permanently modified the bed, reducing it to a stretcher, they proceed with removing the tiles off the roof. The tiles were sections of thatch they were cemented together with clay and then laid over cross beams and those sections were then sealed to keep the rain out. So the men here had to break the seals. And after that, then remove the tiles to lower their friend down into the room.

Again, imagine yourself there picture the scene; you're in the room and all of a sudden, it's already hot and stuffy, you're crowded, you're squeezed together and now dirt and dust

is falling from the ceiling. It's starting to choke you. You don't like it. And it's falling on all the people around you, including Jesus. You're watching teaching and it's falling onto Oh, no, look, the Pharisees and the scribes, that's not good. Those guys are dressed in some pretty nice rags. And they're really important people. They're not going to like dirt and stuff falling all around them.

Everyone's choking from the dust or waving dirt and junk out of their faces. And then through the haze, they start to see this stretcher, descending from the opening in the ceiling. It's lowered by four ropes attached at the four corners of the stretcher, bearing the weight of this helpless paralytic. Gotta give these guys credit, not just for all the work they did, but for excellent aim. How did they do that?

Luke notes, the precision there that he came down into their midst right in front of Jesus, must have been master craftsman here. At this point in the narrative, and there's a bit of a, you need to imagine a bit of a pregnant pause here. Every eye is on Jesus. They're all waiting to see what he's going to do with this poor man who's lying helplessly there in front of him. Based on Jesus' reputation, based on what a number

of them have actually seen for themselves, everybody is anticipating another incredible miracle. They can't wait.

So we've seen here in our outline, occasion for influence now this opportunity to display divine healing power. But Jesus, he spotted something else. Point three, he spotted an opening for forgiveness. When you think about this poor man. Imagine about how humiliated he must have felt at this point. He's now become the center of attention. The reason for the disruption, the reason for people's discomfort and choking. And he knows also that he's interrupted the teaching time. And it's not just anybody teaching, it's the teaching of the best teacher who's ever lived.

He's in front of the most distinguished audience in all of Israel. Most of us, we're all used to being able bodied. But imagine having your mobility taken away. And now you need to rely on other people to carry you around. You can't take care of yourself. You can't go where you want to go, you can't do what you want to do. You're at the mercy of other people. You're at the mercy of their schedule, you're at the mercy of their convenience, you're at the mercy of their goodwill. And now you feel the added embarrassment of interrupting everybody else in town with your needy condition.

And as he's lowered through the roof, by his faithful friends into a room of important able-bodied spectators. And a number of the spectators here are Pharisees and scribes and they teach that being able bodied and wealthy is a mark of God's blessing, but being diseased or infirmed or crippled, that's a mark of God's curse; usually because some hidden sin that you, that other people don't know about, God is cursing you and making you crippled. That was the view that they had spread throughout the entire culture. Even the disciples asked in John 9, "Lord who sinned this man or his parents that he should be born blind?" Jesus dispelled that and said, Neither, it's so that the power of God might be put on display right now."

This poor guy's dangling above everybody. He's being lowered into their midst. And he's being exposed before everybody. He's physically helpless because of his paralysis. But now a new sensation begins to overwhelm him, as he senses his spiritual helplessness as well, because now, he's not just exposed before a roomful of people. He's not just exposed before the theology that condemns him. He's exposed before a holy person and he being a man full of sin.

Perhaps the sins of bitterness and resentment that he felt came to mind or worse, the times that he succumbed to the



temptation to blame God for his condition to be angry and shake his fist at the Almighty for his crippled condition. You can imagine, guy must have felt so ashamed before a holy person like Jesus Christ, extremely nervous. In fact, he can't even say anything. So what does Jesus do? Verse 20. He didn't wait for him to ask, what did he say?

When he saw their faith, said, "Man, your sins are forgiven you." I love the initiative of God here, don't you? Aren't you thankful that God takes initiative with us to bring healing, to bring forgiveness, he doesn't wait for us? Sends a spirit to regenerate us, to open our eyes, to give us faith, that we might place it in him and be saved and healed. And Jesus got right to the issue, didn't he? What good are healthy legs if they just walk you through life with an accusing conscience?

So Jesus saw past this presenting problem, and he got right to the heart of the issue with this poor sinner, "Man, your sins are forgiven you." That's the perfect passive used there. That is to say, your sins have been forgiven you. Jesus is just pronouncing an established settled fact here. Jesus gave this man the declaration of God himself, justified, no more sins. And notice it's not sin in the singular, as if Jesus is healing the particular sin that this man may have committed,

that somehow caused his paralysis. That's not what's going on here.

He's not declaring the forgiveness of some sin that led to his paralysis before God or whatever. Jesus says, "Your sins," plural, "are forgiven you." As in, all your sins. Look, this is comprehensive forgiveness. How could Jesus pronounce such comprehensive forgiveness? Again, notice what preceded Jesus' pronouncement, verse 20, "When he saw" What? "Their faith. When he saw their faith." This is the first time the noun faith has been used in Luke's Gospel, the verbal form was used one time earlier, in Luke chapter 1, when Elizabeth told Mary, guess what she said? She said, "Blessed is she who believed what was spoken from the Lord." Same thing here.

Prior to pronouncing the forgiveness of sins, Jesus saw the necessary precondition, faith, he saw the necessary prerequisite, the essential element of justification. He saw saving faith, there is no forgiveness apart from saving faith. We know that from Ephesians 2:8-9. Faith is the gift of God. "By grace, you've been saved through faith. This is not your own doing. It's the gift of God, not a result of work so that no one may boast."

So we're not saying Jesus forgave the man on his basis of his own works. By the way, it's plural. It's their faith. So he's talking about the faith of all five of those men, the paralytic and all four friends, he saw their faith. He knew they had faith. And it's not just that they did good works by having compassion on a paralyzed man, by interrupting his teaching time, by dropping the guy through the roof. What he saw here is something that only Jesus can see. And what we do see here is that the greatest miracle of all, which is the justification of a guilty sinner, the reconciliation of a vile sinner. That is the greatest miracle Jesus has ever performed.

It's the only miracle that requires a precondition. Jesus saw with keen spiritual insight, with divine perception. He saw the faith of these five men in this paralyzed man, his four faithful friends, he saw what no man could see. According to verse 22, we know that he saw through everything, he saw people's hearts, he saw their minds, he could read their thoughts, he knew what they were pondering in their hearts. He knew their unfavorable judgments, he knew their suspicions, he knew their criticisms. Jesus also knew their sins. He saw this man sins, his piercing gaze saw through the man's physical needs, to his deepest need for forgiveness, when he saw this man's faith.

Now, Jesus had the perception of a divine person, he had the omniscience of deity. And knowing what his judgment is of this situation, we can actually look back at this man's actions, we can look at the actions of these four faithful friends. And we can see and learn more clearly about what true faith looks like. If we look at it from Jesus' perspective.

So with Jesus judgment in mind, let's kind of consider the actions of these faithful five because they are quite instructive about the nature of genuine faith. It's especially instructive in light of the contrast that they present here with the critical scribes and the Pharisees. So going back to verses 18, and 19, and just not reading everything, but just kind of having that in your mind. Notice that in the concern of these men, the men of faith, they were willing to work, weren't they?

They were willing to work. Jesus is the only one that they trusted to heal their friend. And so they were willing to do whatever it took to get their friend before Jesus. They carried that heavy, cumbersome bed through the town of Capernaum. All the way to Peter's home and when the crowd was unwilling to let them through, when the presence of the Pharisees and the scribes and the onlookers created a barrier, they went around it. They found another way. Their faith was willing to work and it was

undeterred by any obstacles. They kept on looking. They, they looked to seek and they didn't find so they went around, they found another way.

Not only that, but these men of faith, they were relatively unconcerned with propriety and good manners. They weren't too terribly concerned about the really nice clothes that those guys were wearing. They were willing to disrupt. They were even willing to make people uncomfortable. They were relatively unconcerned with offending them. We might put it this way, that we could say there was no fear of man, as they exercise faith. Not only that, but these men of faith, they were persistent, weren't they? They wouldn't leave until they got what they came for.

I mean, there was no looking back. They say when Hernan Cortes found the New World, and landed his men on the shore, he burned his ships behind them. You know why? Because he was not going back. He wasn't gonna let any of his men rethink, reconsider when they encountered obstacles. Same thing with these guys. They refuse to look back, they cut that paralyzed man's bed up. Reducing it down to size because they knew in faith, he'd no longer be needing it.

Now even though we can't always see true faith on the outside, those are the marks of genuine saving faith, as well. Here are a few points just to write down, four points just quickly. First, true faith works. True faith, if you've really got true faith, your faith works. It's willing to do whatever it takes to seek God and to do his will. It's a striving faith. It's an active faith. It's not dead, it's not useless. It doesn't just sit there passively. It works.

Second, true faith endures. It's undeterred by obstacles, it perseveres to the very end, even through pain and suffering, even through the severest trials, so true faith works, true faith endures. Third thing, true faith fears God not man. It fears God not man. It's unconcerned with what's socially and culturally acceptable when it comes to pleasing and trusting God. True Faith fears God not man.

The fourth thing, truth faith is both repentant and hopeful. True faith is both repentant and hopeful. When you have true faith, you know you are never going back to the way things were. You're always going to be looking forward to seize the promise of God. It's repentant, turning away from everything that was behind, like Paul pressing forward to what lies ahead.

Just quickly, by way of contrast, notice the contrast of the religious establishment. Where true faith is active and working. The Pharisees, they're just sitting there, critical, judgmental, where true faith was seeking, pushing forward, drawing near, persisting, the Pharisees are waiting, just waiting for Jesus to impress them. Where true faith had no fear of man, no interest in decorum and propriety the Pharisees are offended at Jesus impropriety, a mere man, forgiving sins.

Where true faith is unwilling to go backwards, unwilling to sacrifice, the Pharisees are willing to leave Jesus behind. They forsook Jesus, they chose instead to hold on to their positions of power, and influence, and affluence. They love the honor of men rather than the honor of God. So when the power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal, on such a significant occasion, with this unparalleled opportunity to influence the influencers, Jesus on opening forgiveness, they ran through it, and Jesus forgave the man.

After all, as we said, what good are healthy legs, a sound body, if the man walks away still plagued with his guilt and his shame? What good is it to walk around on good legs, but with a troubled conscience? After all, this life will come to an end, one day and those legs are gonna walk up to and stand before

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their maker. If the sins are not forgiven, the legs won't do any good in a fiery punishment of an eternal hell. Jesus had to start there, didn't he? Started with the greatest need, provided the most profound healing first, and performed the greatest miracle of all.