

# Thy Sins Are Forgiven Thee (Luke 5:17-26)

Sunday school October 2, 2016

I want to call your attention to **READ Luke 5:17-26**. This account is the latest in a string of miracles we have been studying. It's also the last miracle for awhile: the next one is not until chapter 7. This string of miracles started in chapter 4, when an unclean devil was cast out of a man. Then the fever was cast out of Simon Peter's mother-in-law. Then diverse casting outs and healings were done. Then last week in chapter 5 we had the great catch of fish and the leper cleansed. All of these miracles go to show that Jesus had power over all things: spiritual ailments (demons), physical ailments (diseases), physical situations (the fish). It doesn't matter: everything is subject to the power and authority of His word.

The healing we just read about, though, has a slightly different emphasis. The emphasis is not really on the healing, though that is mentioned as well. The emphasis is on forgiveness of sins. That idea appears 4 times in these verses. In verse 20, Jesus says, "Man, thy sins are forgiven thee." In verse 21, the Jewish religious leaders, the scribes and Pharisees, murmur among themselves, "Who can forgive sins, but God alone?" They were very knowledgeable yet very blind. Then in verses 23 and 24 the idea of forgiveness of sins appears twice again in Jesus' response to the scribes and pharisees. So although this is another healing, the focus is on forgiveness of sins. So the question I want us to ponder today is: what does performing miracles have to do with forgiving sins? The scribes and Pharisees never figured that out; let's see if we can figure that out today.

**Transition:** So let me hand out outlines. The first people mentioned are...

**I. The Scribes and Pharisees READ v. 17** This is the first time the scribes and Pharisees are mentioned in Luke. In Matthew, they appear in John the Baptist's ministry, where John calls them a "generation of vipers." That's Matthew 3:7, but Luke doesn't mention them at John's baptism. This is their first appearance in Luke. The name "Pharisee" means "separated one," and there were about 6000 of them throughout the promised land. They were teachers in the synagogues, and they were viewed by the people and themselves as guardians of the law and its proper observance. They also considered their own interpretations, traditions, and regulations to be equal to that of scripture. That's the main error they made.

You may not be aware of this, but many people who attend new-age modern churches view churches like ours as churches full of Pharisees. You've probably never thought of yourself as a Pharisee before; I hadn't until I was accused of being one by such a new age person a few years ago. They say, "scripture never says you can't have praise bands and rock music." No, it doesn't, but it does give guidelines on what kind of music you should have. They say, "scripture never says you can't drink alcohol." No, it doesn't, but it does give strong and clear warnings on the effects of alcohol. We believe in careful obedience to scripture like the Pharisees did. We don't believe in putting the interpretations, traditions, and commandments of men on the same level as the commandments of God like the Pharisees did. That's the difference: the Pharisees put their own interpretations, traditions, and regulations on the same level as God's. We don't do that. We believe in *sola scriptura*, scripture alone has authority, but we believe scripture should be followed, followed fully, and followed carefully. That's where we disagree with the new age folks. I like our position: I think it agrees with God's.

The scribes and Pharisees' appearance at this point also tells us that Jesus was starting to get the Jewish leaders' attention with His miracles. One detail I skipped over in the interest of time two weeks ago when we studied the cleansing of the leper was the last phrase in verse 14. After Jesus cleansed the leper, He tells him to go to the priest and be pronounced clean by the priest as commanded in Leviticus chapter 14. He says in **READ v. 14**. Now that he was clean, He tells him to go to the priest and be pronounced clean "for a testimony unto them," that is, unto the Jewish leaders. The Jews believed, correctly I would say, that only God can cure leprosy. In II Kings chapter 5, when Naaman the Syrian becomes a leper, the King of Syria writes a letter to Jehoram King of Israel asking him to heal Naaman of his leprosy. Jehoram's response was to rend his clothes and say, "Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy?" That's II Kings 5:7. So they thought only God can cure leprosy. So if Jesus cured this man's leprosy, and only God can cure leprosy, then Jesus must be God. That's the testimony unto them, the Jewish priests and leaders, that Jesus is God in the flesh. Partly as a result of this kind of testimony, He is starting to get attention from the Jewish leaders, the scribes and Pharisees.

**Transition:** Next item...

**II. Sins Forgiven READ v. 18-20** The sickness this man has is called palsy. As we would expect from Luke, that's a medical term. Today we call it paralysis, so he was unable to move at least parts of his body. We don't know the cause, but we do know his friends went to extraordinary lengths to get him to Jesus. Verse 19 says they went onto the housetop, so apparently Jesus was in someone's house rather than a synagogue at this point, and they let him down through the ceiling tiles. That's how intent they were at getting him to Jesus. The closest thing I can think of to this today is prayer warriors. Prayer warriors go to great lengths to get their case and your case (when they are praying for you) to Jesus. Prayer warriors are a real blessing, and they are really hard to find. A few years ago I had a situation I shared with a friend from my former church in Ohio. He said, "I'll pray for you." A couple of months later, I got an email from him asking me, "have you gotten any resolution on that situation yet?" "No, I answered." "I'll intensify my prayers for you." A few months later, I still hadn't gotten what I really wanted, but I did get peace about the situation from God. That's what prayer warriors do; through persistent and faithful prayer they bust open the ceiling tiles to get your case to God. We have some in this church. If you want to be a real blessing to people, become a prayer warrior. Go to great lengths to get answers from God.

The main focus of this text is in verse 20, where Jesus says without prompting, "Man, thy sins are forgiven thee." There are a couple of things I want you to notice about that. First, Jesus seems more interested in their faith and their sins being forgiven than He is in the palsy being healed. Surely Jesus noticed that the man was paralyzed, but He doesn't exclaim, "Oh, you're paralyzed" like we might do. The first thing He says is, "Man, thy sins are forgiven thee." He's more interested in their spiritual condition than their physical condition. Second, the men never ask for their sins to be forgiven. Jesus just observes their faith, and based on their faith says, "Man, thy sins are forgiven thee." At the church I came from in Ohio, the way we did evangelism was by leading someone in a prayer of faith. I remember as a kid, I would pray the prayer and think, "I'm saved now." A couple of months later, a different speaker would say it a little differently. I would think, "I didn't quite pray it that way before. I'll pray it that way this time, and this time it will be real." A few months later, same thing. I'm not necessarily against leading someone in a prayer to lead them to faith, but if you are going to do that you had better be clear that it is not a prayer that saves you; it is faith that saves you. I remember the relief I had when I finally realized that prayer I prayed didn't matter. What mattered is I stopped trusting in myself and starting trusting in Him. They don't pray anything to Jesus for their sins to be forgiven. Jesus just sees their faith and immediately declares, "Man, thy sins are forgiven thee."

**Transition:** Next point...

**III. Pharisees' Reaction READ v. 21** In several places the Old Testament indicates that only God can forgive sins. I listed a couple of them in your outline. Psalm 32:5 says, "I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." There are a lot of actions on the speaker's part, but God is the one who forgives sin. Also, in Isaiah 43:25, God is speaking and says, "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins." So being students of the Old Testament scriptures, the scribes and Pharisees would have known that only God can forgive sins. We read this through faith and realize: if Jesus cleansed leprosy, which only God can do, and Jesus forgives sins, which only God can do, then Jesus must be God. That's the point that Jesus tries to make to scribes and Pharisees over and over, including here and through the testimony of the man cleansed of leprosy. In most of the conversations He has with the Jews in the Gospel of John, that's the point He is trying to make: I AM the God of the Old Testament. But most of them won't believe. Instead, they accuse Him here of blasphemy, or pretending to be God, one of the most serious violations of the law anyone can commit.

**Transition:** So next Jesus tries to show them (again) that He's not pretending to be God; He is God. That's...

**IV. Jesus' Response READ v. 22-24** If a man is doing the talking, it is easier for a man to say, "thy sins be forgiven thee" because there is no immediate outward manifestation of forgiveness of sins. When I first trusted Christ and my sins were forgiven, I did not see a cloven tongue of fire descend on me to indicate that my sins are forgiven. There were immediate changes on the inside, and over time there are changes on the outside as we follow Him and trust Him more, but there is no immediate visible change when our sins are forgiven. On the other hand, if I say to a paralyzed person, "rise up and walk" and they can't, I've immediately been exposed as a fraud or a pretender. That's if man is the one doing the talking. If God is the one doing it, they are equally easy: nothing is too hard for God. So the fact that He can accomplish the "hard" thing, the thing that has an immediate outward manifestation, implies that He can accomplish the "easy" thing too, the thing that does not have an immediate outward manifestation. The fact that He really has the power to heal the palsy implies that He really has the power to forgive sins too.

**Transition:** Last point...

**V. Paralysis Healed READ v. 25-26** Notice that the healing happened immediately. This would have been hard for man, but it was not hard at all for God. This also speaks to the authority in Jesus' word. Jesus said do it, and he did it immediately. The crowds reaction was the usual for a miracle: fear and worship of God.

## Conclusion

As a final thought for this week, we usually start this hour and the Wednesday night hour with a time to share blessings and testimonies. As we walk with Him, we see on a weekly or even daily basis how God takes care of little things for us. One reason He does that is just because He loves us, but another is to remind us that our sins are forgiven. There is nothing better than knowing your sins are forgiven. One of my favorite verses is Romans 4:8, which says, "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." If your sins are forgiven, regardless of anything else, you are blessed. Jesus took care of every major problem we ever had on the cross, but He takes care of a lot of the little ones too. The little ones He takes care of on a daily basis for us remind us that the big one is indeed taken care of. He really has power over physical ailments, He really has power over spiritual ailments, and He really has power to forgive sins.