

Luke 5:12-26 Contentious Jesus

Forgiving

23-2-25

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The story goes that CS Lewis was once addressing a public rally when a heckler interjected, "Name me one thing Christianity offers me that I can't get somewhere else?" CS Lewis's answer was, "Forgiveness".

Christianity is all about forgiveness -

- the gift of forgiveness Jesus wins for us on the cross when he dies for our sins.
- the forgiveness we should offer others who have wronged us.

This morning we come to the fourth passage in our series Contentious Jesus, looking at Jesus early ministry in Galilee through the eyes of Luke. We have two stories before us in Luke Chapter 5. I encourage you to have them open in front of you to get the most out of the message. If you are using the Pew Bible it's on p1031, Luke 5: 12 - 26.

So there are two stories here. They are both healing stories. One man is healed of leprosy. The other man is a paralytic who is healed. In both cases Jesus is contentious.

He heals the man with leprosy by touching him. That was a no no. It would have made Jesus ceremonially unclean but also he was taking the risk of catching the disease himself.

The healing of the paralytic is contentious because Jesus doesn't say what you'd expect, "Be healed." He says, "Your sins are forgiven." And didn't that raise eyebrows.

So once again Jesus is contentious.

So let's look at the healing of the man with leprosy in more detail first. Leprosy was a dreaded disease in the ancient world. It is still a problem in some parts of the world, however we now have drugs that can treat it. Back in the 1st century, treatments were very limited and it was very contagious. Therefore lepers had to live on the outskirts of town in their own colony. There was social and mental anguish quite apart from the physical pain.

This man makes a very humble request of Jesus, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."

Of course Jesus is willing, and he does it in two ways – touching the man and the command, "Be clean." So simple really. It is very similar to the previous healing accounts we've been hearing over the last three weeks. Jesus gives simple commands and people are healed immediately.

What is new here is touch. And of course as we've already noted, the disease being leprosy, means the touch is very purposeful.

How long might it have been since this man had any human touch? Touch is a very powerful means of connecting with one another. Parents and children, husbands and wives, friends and neighbours – all in their different ways use touch. It may be a hug, a handshake, a light touch on the arm or an embrace. This man had been cut off from all such contact probably for many years. And then Jesus

reaches out and touches him. We can only imagine the exhilaration and joy that the leper must have felt.

Jesus tells the healed man to show himself to the priest. This was the means of ensuring it was a genuine healing and the man could be accepted back into the community. But in this case it also plays a secondary role. Jesus says it will be “a testimony to them”. In other words they won't be able to deny that Jesus' healings are genuine. The question though is, will they take the next step and recognise that it is the Messiah doing the healing?

That's where all our stories of Jesus in this series have been pointing. Here is further testimony, Jesus is the Messiah. Will the priests have eyes to see?

But what about the second healing, that of the paralytic.

I think this is one of the most colourful, exciting stories in the Bible and it has always caught my imagination.

Firstly, the determined faith of the friends carrying the mat. You can just imagine them trying to push their way through the crowd and the crowd pushing them back saying wait your turn. And then the struggle climbing up on the roof and carrying the mat at the same time. Not easy for four men, maybe more and a stretcher.

Then removing the tiles in order to get him down to Jesus. I mean they must have made a pretty big hole in order to keep the mat flat and get him down safely. I hope the home insurance premiums were up to date!

What is most important about these friends and their efforts to get the paralytic to Jesus, is their faith. Jesus recognises their faith v20. On the basis of the friend's faith Jesus heals this man.

And how does he do it? With the leper it was the command “Be clean”. Here we might have expected “Be healed”, but what does Jesus say? “Your sins are forgiven.” I think Jesus liked being controversial.

He knows the Pharisees and the teachers of the law are present. He knows this will be offensive to them. And because of that, he says it. Jesus was not always polite company, minding his P's and Q's.

Even when the Pharisees don't say anything and are just thinking about their dissatisfaction, Jesus reveals their thoughts and tackles the controversial issue.

So what's wrong with saying, “Your sins are forgiven”?

Well, when an offence or sin is committed there are only two people who can offer forgiveness.

- the person who has been offended against
- and God.

Had the paralytic personally offended Jesus? No there's not the slightest hint of that. So Jesus forgiving him must have seemed very strange to the crowd there that day.

Let me give you a present day example. Imagine if I went over to John Beaufoy and said, “John I don't like the way you played that last song, and bopped him one on the nose.” And then Ross came over to me and said, “Chris, your sin is forgiven.” How would that make John feel? Pretty lousy I would think. John would be thinking, ‘Ross who do you think you are; you can't do that! I'm the one he's offended’.

There are only two people who can forgive me

-one is John, the one who has been sinned against.

-and the other is God, because all sin in the end is an offence against God.

The point here of course is that Jesus offers this man forgiveness because he is God. And the Pharisees don't miss that point.

He asks the Pharisees a tricky question. Jesus loved asking tricky questions.

V23 "Which is easier: to say, "Your sins are forgiven; or to say, "Get up and walk"?"

There is an irony in this question isn't there and that's what makes it tricky.

In one sense it's easier to say your sins are forgiven? Because normally there's no way of finding out whether it actually happened. On the other hand to say get up and walk, that's hard because if it doesn't happen you are immediately exposed as a fraud.

So it would seem it's harder saying "Get up and walk".

But in actual fact forgiving sins is the bigger and more difficult thing than healing. In the grand scheme of things it is the harder thing.

So what Jesus does is actually take two very hard things - forgiving sin and physical healing, and links them. And the physical healing becomes an outward sign that he really does have the authority to forgive sins.

Jesus is really laying it all on the line here. If the healing doesn't happen then he will be seen to be both a charlatan healer and a liar claiming to forgive sins.

For the Pharisees they simply saw Jesus taking Divine prerogatives upon himself and that was blasphemy. The physical healing was a sign that Jesus really could forgive sins. And they couldn't stomach that. The normal way God forgave sin was through the Temple and the sacrificial system in the law of Moses.

But Jesus is slicing right through that and declaring that he has authority to forgive sins. In fact he says the 'Son of Man' has authority on earth to forgive sins. And this would add further fuel to the fire for the Pharisees and the Jewish authorities. The astute ones would know that this phrase comes from the prophet Daniel. And it's a prophecy about the Messiah coming in power and glory, and with the authority of God himself. So for Jesus to call himself the Son of Man would have got them even more riled.

So how does the story end? The paralysed man is healed immediately. Surprise, surprise! it's the same pattern isn't it. Jesus heals instantly.

V25 Tells us the man went home praising God.

V26 Tells us the crowd were amazed and also gave praise to God. In fact they were filled with awe and said, "We have seen remarkable things today."

- Was it remarkable because they saw a man being lowered down through the roof?
- Was it remarkable to see the paralytic jumping up off his mat and going home praising God?
- Was it remarkable because Jesus did it by declaring the forgiveness of sin?

Well I think all of the above.

The question the crowds are being challenged with is, 'Who is this man?'

The crowds have now seen Jesus in the synagogue in Nazareth read a prophecy about the Messiah from the prophet Isaiah. And then basically say I am the one.

Contentious Jesus!

We've seen Jesus in the synagogue in Capernaum on the Sabbath driving out a demon. Contentious Jesus!

We've seen Jesus heal Simon's mother-in-law as well as many other people hanging around the house.

Contentious Jesus!

We've seen Jesus teaching with great authority,

- in the synagogue at Capernaum,
- standing in Peter's boat on the sea of Galilee with the people on the shore,
- and today we've seen Jesus teaching at this house in Capernaum.

And a recurring theme is that he taught with great authority. Contentious Jesus!

We've seen Jesus heal a leper through a simple instruction, "Be clean" and through touch. Contentious Jesus!

And finally we've seen Jesus, the Son of Man with authority on earth to forgive sins. And this is confirmed through a miraculous healing. Contentious Jesus!

Who is this man?

I want to conclude with the testimony of a lady by the name of Angelina.

I was reading a book this week by an Australian author Naomi Read, "Every Moment, Everywhere", And it has a lot of lovely stories about ordinary Aussies coming to faith.

This is Angelina's story,

I was a new age nomad for 10 years. It was after my husband left me in my 40s. He took all of his belongings and the car, and he left me a note and \$40. We had five children aged 5, 10, 12, 15 and 17.

But I gradually found work, and the children grew up and left home. That was when I became fascinated by other things. I had no moral compass at all. I had always been interested in eastern religions, so I began to read lots of new age books, and they said that we find God within. They said that we become God. I was so deceived, but I wanted more, and I was never satisfied. I can't even tell you all the terrible things I did in those years.

Until one day, I was on my way to Perth, camping. Two people came up to me and asked me where I was going. I said I was on my way to Perth and that my car wasn't going very well. The lady asked me if I would like them to pray for me. I said yes, and they did.

The next day I drove into Perth and I couldn't stop thinking about this encounter. I found my way to a church and talked to the pastor. He spoke to me about Jesus. He talked about sin. I hadn't thought about sin for a long time. I suddenly realised I was a sinner just as much as anyone else, and I needed saving.

I got the revelation straight away. Jesus died for me, and all my sins were forgiven. I prayed a sinner's prayer and asked to receive the Holy Spirit.

It was amazing! I was 57 years old and God made me all new. I started reading the Gospels, and the truth came into my mind little by little. It seemed incredible that an almighty God who had a trillion things to attend to: stars and planets, and billions of souls to care about... that he would pay attention to one sorry and simple soul like me...

Remember that question asked of CS Lewis at the very beginning. What is one thing Christianity offers that can't be found anywhere else? Forgiveness.

- So Jesus is not just a great healer.
- He is not just one who can cast out demons.
- And he is not just a great fisherman, who can bring in a great catch?

He actually has authority to forgive sins.

Do you have the assurance that your sins are forgiven? You know you can have that assurance, as sure as the paralytic walked away that day praising God with his legs restored.

If you want that assurance simply trust your life to the Saviour. Hand control of your life over to Jesus.

And I want to pray a simple prayer now that might help you do that.

Lord Jesus, you are the Son of Man, Messiah. Thank you that you have authority on earth to forgive sins. Please forgive mine.

Thank you for the cross on which you died for my sin.

Thank you for your resurrection and the promise of new life.

Thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Fill me with your Holy Spirit that I might have assurance of forgiveness and walk with you all the days of my life.

Amen