

Luke 5:17-26

Introduction

A car, a lump of ice the size of an engine, an SAS paratrooper, a cow and a potato sized meteorite. All things that have made the news for unexpectedly dropping in through the roofs of houses in recent years. In today's passage we have the details of another unexpected drop in through a roof, a paralysed man lowered down on a mat into the midst of a gathering of people from across Galilee, Judea and Jerusalem. They left saying "We have seen remarkable things today." However the most remarkable thing that they had seen was not a man descending down through the roof. They saw not only the physical healing of this man but furthermore they heard Jesus lay claim to even greater power- the power to forgive sin.

Those who had come to listen to Jesus might have had some inkling that they might see something special- in this and the previous chapter of Luke we read about Jesus performing many healings and casting out numerous demons in the early part of his public ministry. Having spoken in the synagogues of Galilee he had also become known for his teaching. As a result, at the start of the passage we find Jesus teaching in a house packed with people, who verse 17 tells us, had come not just from the surrounding region of Galilee but also from the region of Judea and the city of Jerusalem beyond.

Verse 17 also tells us that Pharisees and teachers of the law were present. The emphasis of the Pharisees as a religious party, of which many of the professional teachers of the law were also members, was on strict observance of both the Old Testament law and on later religious regulations added to it. On reading that the Pharisees and teachers of the law were present, those familiar with the gospels might well expect some tension between them and Jesus. Expectations of disapproval are certainly not disappointed here as the passage progresses and this is in fact the first of a series of episodes recorded in Luke's gospel in which this group disapproved of Jesus and his disciples activities.

Religious experts certainly weren't the only ones interested in seeing Jesus though. In verse 18, a paralysed man and his friends arrive- let's look back at the passage- verse 18: Some men came carrying a paralysed man on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus.

Having heard about the other healings that Jesus had carried out, it's not surprising that this paralysed man would want to see Jesus in the hope that he too would be healed. However, when the group carrying this man arrived, presumably feeling ready for rest from all the mat carrying, they found that all the good seats were long gone.

Their attempts to move their way through the crowd already present to reach Jesus proved fruitless. They didn't allow this to thwart them and went up to the roof of the house, made

an opening in the roof and dangled the paralysed man down into the centre of the crowd where Jesus was teaching- v19 says: When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus.

For the paralysed man and his friends, getting him to Jesus was evidently of upmost importance. They did not allow logistical obstacles to get in their way. Their priority was reaching Jesus. When the paralysed man eventually did reach Jesus, the first thing that Jesus addresses is the man's sin. And this leads me to the first point for today:

The priority of forgiving sin

When speaking to an audience, if something distracting happens, one course of action is to carry on, make no reference to it and hope that the audience hasn't noticed it. This is not what Jesus did. Neither did he rebuke the man for interrupting his teaching or ask for the man to be cleared out of the way. Rather he addressed him warmly as 'Friend'. Verse 20 says that Jesus saw the group's in Him, which had motivated them to not only make the journey to the house but also to persevere when at first they couldn't get past the crowd. Jesus' response to their approach in faith is to say to the paralysed man, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."

On the surface, you might think that Jesus' priority would have been to carry on where he left off with His teaching. Or to have healed the man's paralysis, then maybe dealt with spiritual things. But the first thing that Jesus addressed was not his paralysis, but his sin.

As much as the man's paralysis was a serious problem for him, the problem of sin is a bigger problem for him and for us. Sin, our rejection of God and His rule, has separated every man and woman from God since the beginning when Adam and Eve rejected God's rule by eating the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Sin means that we face death and eternal separation from God if our sin is not dealt with. When we have the right perspective on sin, considering it's consequences, it's easy to see why the paralysed man's greatest need, the need that Jesus addressed first, was his need for his sins to be forgiven.

Have you ever had to deal with several pressing needs at once? You've found the children drawing on the walls, the dog has stolen a pair of your pants and is running around the garden with them and there is a delivery man at the door needing you to sign for a parcel- what do you deal with first - or maybe that's just my house. Well, when addressing the pressing needs in the situation in the verses today Jesus first dealt with the problem of the man's sin. If we consider our sin in the right perspective, having our sin dealt with will be top priority for us too.

For the man in these verses paralysis would have been a major issue in his life. We too may have many issues to deal with as we go through life and some of these issues may seem of

great importance in themselves. But these verses remind us that it is our relationship with our creator God which is of the most upmost, eternal, importance.

If you wouldn't yet call yourself a Christian, Jesus continues to warmly welcome those who come to him in faith to deal with their sin, just as he did with the man in this passage- it's well worth the effort to find out more about Him. We see as the passage progresses that the faith of the group with the paralysed man in Jesus power is well placed.

For those of us who have already come to Jesus, as we continue to rely on His forgiveness day by day while we battle against sin, it's a reminder of how important the issue of our sin is. Although Jesus' death on the cross paid the penalty completely for our sin, we shouldn't take this lightly. Being reminded of the seriousness of the problem of our sin should spur us on to be all the more thankful to our saviour. It should also spur us on to prioritise the fight against sin in our lives and help to keep other problems and struggles in perspective.

So, having thought about how important our need is to have sin dealt with, the next question we come to is who actually has the authority to deal with our sin? My next point is:

The power to forgive sin

Following Jesus telling the man that his sin's were forgiven in v20, v21 tell us: The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, "Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

Their thought that it is God's place to forgive is correct. God is the creator of the universe- all creation and the right to rule over it is His. When we sin we reject God's good rule over His world. We may hurt other people in the process but ultimately it is God who is the wronged party when we sin. The authority to forgive people their sin, is therefore, also His.

By claiming to be able to forgive sins, Jesus was claiming this authority that is God's authority- that's why the Pharisees said "Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy?" - who is this speaking outrageously disrespectfully about God by claiming to do something that is only God's right to do.

This is in fact authority that Jesus has every right to lay claim to- as John 1 says of Jesus: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.'

This however wasn't clear to the Pharisees and the teachers of the law at this point.

Cases where people don't realise who their talking to are often quite entertaining, as long as we're not involved. I read a story about a dissatisfied shopper, making a complaint to someone in a shop. As the discussion continued the shopper became no less dissatisfied then insisted on seeing the manager. The manager was summoned and arrived looking a

little confused. The shopper demanded that the employee that she's been dealing with be fired. The manager then told the shopper 'I can't do that'. The person that the shopper had been dealing with and had assumed was a junior employee was in fact the owner of the shop- they had the ultimate say as to how the shop was run. An embarrassing end to the episode for the shopper.

The Pharisees present in today's verses also didn't realise who they were dealing with and were about to be similarly embarrassed when Jesus provided a miracle to demonstrate his position of authority later in the passage.

So who do we think Jesus is? It's important because he says that he has the power to forgive sin, which, as we've considered, is of utmost importance. If we get the question of who Jesus is wrong, we face being more than just being embarrassed, we face missing out on the one source of forgiveness of sin. There is no forgiveness without God, we can't sort ourselves out on our own. Only God can forgive us for not living as we should in His world. If you've never considered who Jesus is before, there's no time like the present to consider it.

In the last section of the passage we find the answer to the question of whether Jesus is a blasphemer or true God in the form of a visible miracle, which Jesus provides as proof that the man's sin has been forgiven. Our last heading is...

The proof of forgiven sin

Before they had had chance to voice their scepticism about Jesus v22-23 say: Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, "Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? 23 Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'?. Jesus knew what only God knows their inmost, unspoken thoughts. Perhaps a first clue to the Pharisees that they had got Jesus wrong if the thought he was an impostor.

Jesus asks them a question in v23: Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? The question has two levels to it. While it is easier to say 'Your sins are forgiven' than 'Get up and walk' without being disproved, it is more difficult to say to anyone 'Your sins are forgiven' and for it to genuinely be true than to say to a paralysed man 'Get up and walk'.

Our status before God, forgiven or unforgiven, is an invisible reality. Our physical state, paralysed or not, is visible to the eye. Jesus offered proof of the invisible reality of forgiven sin in the form of a visible miracle- the physical healing of the paralysed man, to confirm his divine authority. Take a look at v24, Jesus says: "But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So he said to the paralysed man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home."

Surely enough, proof follows in v25: " 25 Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. 26 Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, "We have seen remarkable things today".

Jesus refers to himself as the Son of Man - referencing the prophesised figure of which Daniel 7:13-14 says - 13 "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man,[a] coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. 14 He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

The healing provides proof that Jesus is indeed who he says that he is- the Son of Man- the one who is given all authority by the Father and whose kingdom will last forever- being in very nature God, worshiped by all nations. The paralytic man was indeed forgiven because he had been granted forgiveness by God himself.

When an armed conflict between nations ends and peace is declared, the status of the warring factions changes from at war to at peace. You can't see this change in status itself but it is reflected in the physical world: guns stop firing, armed forces return home, defensive installations are removed. At the end of the second world war a number of soldiers of the Japanese army, based in densely forested islands, went for years without knowing that the war had ended. The last of these to be found was Tero Nakamura, who was captured in 1974. Surrounded by jungle, there was no clear evidence of any change of the end of the war for him. Some leaflets were dropped from a plane saying that the war was over, but with no obvious physical sign of any change he assumed that they were just enemy propaganda and that the conflict continued. Once brought into the outside world he would have been able to see that where there were once battles raging before he went into the jungle, that the soldiers and armaments had now gone; where there had been destruction, there had been rebuilding. It would have been obvious to him from what he saw around him that peace had indeed been declared- a physical, visible indication of the invisible change in status from war to peace.

Similarly Jesus healing of the paralytic man provided those present with a physical authentication of the man's invisible change in status from unforgiven to forgiven. It provided proof that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.' - that Jesus is not a blasphemer but the Son of God.

It's a key truth that Jesus wants people to know - that He, the Son of Man, has authority on earth to forgive sins. We can be confident when we come to Him for forgiveness that He has the authority to grant it. And we don't just have to look to the healing of the man in this passage to have confidence in this, or indeed just to any of the many other miracles that Jesus performed. We can see it ultimately in Jesus death and resurrection- the culmination of his mission of forgiveness. In Luke 9, verse 22 when Jesus predicted his death to his

disciples he told them: “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.”

Jesus had to suffer and die in our place, facing the wrath and rejection that we deserve for our sin to pay the price for our forgiveness. His resurrection back to life on the third day, as He had predicted, provides the ultimate proof of the change in status of those who come to Jesus for forgiveness from unforgiven to forgiven. Those who trust in him can be certain of everlasting life in his kingdom, which will never be destroyed.

Therefore, if we're trusting in Jesus, these verses are a reminder of the great confidence that we can have that Jesus has dealt with our sin, once and for all, which is a wonderful thing to reflect on. If you're not yet trusting in Jesus, this confidence can be yours too- it's a confidence not built on our own merit, but on the person of Jesus as the one with the proven authority to forgive.

Conclusion

So to conclude, in today's verses we've been reminded of the priority of dealing with sin- our greatest need to have our sin dealt with. The power to forgive sin is God's alone. And Jesus, God the Son, gives us proof that he can deal with our sin - in providing a visible miracle to heal the paralysed man in this passage and ultimately in His death and resurrection.

If you came here today unconvinced of Jesus significance in your life, or maybe even convinced of His unimportance, I'd like to challenge you to look, or maybe look again) at Jesus life, death and resurrection. If you are already trusting Jesus for your forgiveness, what a great reminder of the seriousness of situation that Jesus saved us from and of the great confidence that we can have in the forgiveness and life that he offers.