

LUKE

“Extraordinary Things”

Luke 5:17-26

Sunday, April 23, 2017

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“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 they were 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 midst before Jesus. And when he saw their faith, he said, ‘Man, your sins are forgiven you.’ And the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, saying, ‘Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?’ 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 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. And amazement seized them all, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, ‘We have seen extraordinary things today’” (Luke 5:17–26, ESV).

Heavenly Father, we grateful that you have given us your word, so that through your word we may know you, and in knowing you we may know ourselves. I pray this morning that the same Holy Spirit who inspired these words of Scripture would now illuminate our hearts as we study it. I pray that where we are self-righteous and spiritually blind you would challenge us. I pray that where we are broken that you would heal us. And most of all, I pray you would give us eyes to see Jesus, so that we would be a people amazed by his extraordinary power and grace. We pray this in Jesus’s mighty name, AMEN.

I. Introduction

This morning we are diving back into our line-by-line, verse-by-verse study of the Gospel According to Luke. To catch you up on the story: Jesus Christ of Nazareth, the son of a carpenter, has very suddenly seemed to come out of no where as a preacher God’s Word. More than that, he appears to be some type of a prophet who is able to move in the miraculous power of God. Jesus is able to confront evil spirits compel them to leave people who are in spiritual bondage. He is able to speak to diseases and heal people who have diseases and broken bodies. It is as if creation itself is bowing its knee at his authority.

Needless to say, no one had experienced anything like Jesus in centuries. So after a very short while, Jesus began to garner a lot of attention. Not only is Jesus an itinerant preacher who is going from town to town to preach in his home-region of Galilee, but now, people are coming from all over the nation to hear his words and experience his power.

Not everybody is excited about Jesus, however. Sure, in the crowds of the people gathering around him, Jesus has his disciples, his fans, as well as the many people who are simply curious. But now Jesus is even attracting critics and opponents, who feel the need to put this new Rabbi from Galilee in his place.¹

But today, both Jesus's fans and critics are in for something that will shock them. We begin this text here in Luke 5 with another moment of Jesus teaching God's word. But we will end with utter amazement seizing everyone who is present. In fact, the last words of today's text are the people saying to themselves, "*We have seen extraordinary things today.*"

So for the rest of our time this morning, I want to explore these "*Extraordinary Things*" in four different ways: 1.) *The Extraordinary Unbelief of the Pharisees*, 2.) *The Extraordinary Faith of a Believing Community*, 3.) *The Extraordinary Grace of Jesus*, and 4.) *the Extraordinary Authority of the Son of Man*.

II. Text

1.) The Extraordinary Unbelief of the Pharisees.

Our text begins: "*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*" (Luke 5:17a, ESV). Here for the very first time in Luke we are introduced to the Jewish religious leaders known as the Pharisees. And, as many of you who have read the gospels already know, the Pharisees are in many ways the ongoing opponents of Jesus throughout the gospels. In fact, now that we know who they are, the next five episodes in Luke are going to be one controversy after another between Jesus and the Pharisees.

However, I want to be somewhat careful in how we approach our understanding of the Pharisees. I think we are tempted to oversimplify the Pharisees and assume they are just bad guys because they were born villains, and "haters are gonna hate." This certainly isn't the case. In fact, you could say that the Pharisees thought very much that they were the good guys. And that is precisely why they are so dangerous. Haven't you noticed in TV shows and movies, that often the best bad guys are the ones who think they are good, who have understandable motives, and who are easy to empathize with.

So to steal a phrase from the great C.S. Lewis, *we should not be pharisaical against the Pharisees*. Instead, we should seek to understand what motivated them in their opposition to Jesus, so that we can avoid their sin.

So who are the Pharisees?

Originally, the Pharisees were a group of people who had very noble ideals. They were noticing that God's people were beginning to make a lot of compromises with the outside culture, in such a way that they were no longer distinct. Thus, the Pharisees were leaders of a religious movement that said, we want to live in the world, but not be of the world. We have a special call to live holy lives as God's holy people. As a movement the Pharisees had a high view of Scripture, a high view of personal holiness, and a hope that one day God's kingdom would come.

¹ Fred B. Craddock, *Luke*, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990), 74.

However, by the time of Jesus, the Pharisees had evolved into a special interest group² with a very particular religious and political agenda, with some very negative consequences. Their high view of Scripture morphed into a belief that even their interpretation of Scripture was divinely inspired. Their high view of holiness morphed into a self-righteous belief that through very regimented observance of their interpretation law that the Jewish people could earn God's favor, overcome their political oppressors, and usher in God's kingdom on earth.

So what was the sin of the Pharisees? Their sin was spiritual blindness arising from pride and self-righteousness.

The reason the unbelief of the Pharisees is "extraordinary" is that in reality there should have been no other group of people more excited to meet the messiah. However, when he was literally right in front of them they missed him because of their spiritual pride. And we should be very interested in understanding the Pharisees, because we must not view ourselves as immune from their sin, and as a result miss Jesus when he is right in front of us.

Here are a few diagnostic questions to see if this might be us:

Are you ever able to be wrong, are you able to be taught, and are you able to be challenged? Or do you always assume that your thoughts are without error, by virtue that they are yours?

Do you read God's word to merely confirm your opinions, or do you read God's word to be challenged?

Do you spend an inordinate amount of time thinking about how another group of people gets it all wrong, but how you and your group get it right?

Do you find it necessary to criticize other people for their words and behavior, all the while you are nursing your own secret sin?

Do you think that it is your job to "put people in their place"?

And if I read that list, and all you could do is think about someone else, do you see what you did there? If we are honest, this is an on-going temptation for all of us, and it should lead us to a place of humility.

The unbelief of Pharisees is a reminder to all of us that ***true holiness must flow from the place of true humility.***

2.) The Extraordinary Faith of a Believing Community

Moving on our passage begins to set the scene for the miraculous: "... 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 they were seeking to bring him in and lay him before Jesus, but finding no way to bring him in,

² Wright refers to the Pharisees as a type of political "pressure group." N.T. Wright. *Luke for Everyone*. (Louisville: WJK, 2001, 2004), 59-60.

because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the midst before Jesus” (Luke 5:17b–19, ESV).

Essentially, the building where Jesus was teaching seemed to be filled with Pharisees from all over the country checking Jesus out, evaluating, and sizing up this new upstart prophet’s ministry, so much so that people are even blocking the doorway of the building Jesus is in (cf. Mk. 2:2).³ Meanwhile, there is a group of people who have a paralyzed friend, and they are desperate to bring this man before Jesus so that Jesus can heal him.

However, apparently this man has some really good friends. Their love for their friend outweighs their desire for convenience. In some pretty impressive improvisation and lateral thinking, they decide if they can’t get in, then maybe they can go down. So they climb on the roof. Then they somehow get their paralyzed friend on the roof. Then they removed part of the roof, and devise a way for their friend to be lowered on his bed. (The text doesn’t say this, but I can only imagine that an engineer is a part of this friend-group).

I think by their actions this group of people shows that not only do they have love for their friend, but also they have extraordinary faith in what Jesus can do. Why else would they go to this trouble? And then the text says something fascinating: *“And when he saw their faith, he said, ‘Man, your sins are forgiven you”* (Luke 5:20, ESV).

Jesus is able to see their faith, and he responds to their faith. And I think it is crucial for us to distinguish that Jesus responds to the faith – not of the paralyzed man – but of his friends.

Now there are a lot of things going on in this text, but the thing I want to emphasize today is one of the deepest core values of Redeemer Christian Church. This text is a beautiful example of what Christian community could be and should be. ***True Christian community is a community that is built on a deep faith in Christ and a sincere love for one another. It is community that doesn’t give up when it is inconvenient, but rather presses closer to Christ.***

And this should challenge us on two levels. First, are you vulnerable enough to stop pretending and allow people to see and help you through your weakness and pain? And secondly, are you willing to do what it takes to help people you love – both Christians and non-Christians – get to Jesus?

There is simply no such thing in the New Testament as isolated, independent Christianity. We are called to belong to and participate in Christian community.

3.) The Extraordinary Grace of Jesus

Now when Jesus said to this man, *“Man your sins are forgiven you,”* I think everyone would have been shocked. The paralyzed man would have been shocked. His friends would have been shocked. The disciples would have been shocked. And you better believe the Pharisees were shocked.

³ Luke omitted Mark’s description of the crowded house and doorway that necessitated lowering the man through the roof. He may have assumed that his readers, like modern readers who read the present account in light of the Markan account, were familiar enough with the story (cf. 1:4) to supply this detail. Or Luke may have thought it sufficient simply to tell about a large crowd in 5:17, 19. Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 176.

After all this is another first in the book of Luke. In Luke, Jesus had cast out demons, healed people, and performed miracles. But here in Luke 5:20, it is *the very first time he pronounces the forgiveness of sins*.

The paralyzed man comes to Jesus with a problem. But ***Jesus gets to the problem beneath the problem. And the deepest of all problems is the problem of sin.***

Now among biblical scholars, there is general uncertainty concerning whether or not this passage is suggesting that the man's paralysis was due to his own sin. I certainly would not be comfortable with making that claim. However, I do think it is safe to say that the reason for all brokenness in the world is the fact that humanity let sin into the world. Thus, when Jesus forgives the man before healing him, he is showing the world that he isn't here to merely treat symptoms, he is here to take care of the cause. He is here to address our ultimate problem.

And here, for the first time we see Jesus begin to take care of this ultimate problem. And how does he address this problem? Not by good advice, not by violence, not by a magical spell – but by extraordinary and amazing grace.

I know for some of you in this room, there is real pain and brokenness in your life. It may be pain in your physical body. It may be brokenness in your marriage or your family. It may be your job, your finances, or your friendships. But today the word of God reminds that whatever our pain and brokenness, our greatest need is always Jesus extraordinary and amazing grace. And it is often in our pain and brokenness that we are susceptible to encounter that grace.

4.) The Extraordinary Authority of the Son of Man.

To do what Jesus has just done by forgiving this man would not have just been surprising. It would have been viewed as beyond audacious, and even scandalous. After all, the Jewish people knew that God had ways to forgive sin (e.g. the temple, sacrifices, and the Day of Atonement).⁴ But here is Jesus simply by the authority of his words pronouncing forgiveness.

And then, to top it all off, he refers to himself by a very specific title – the “Son of Man.” The average person may not have known what “Son of Man” meant, but the Pharisees did, because the Pharisees knew their Bible.⁵ Thus, when Jesus said he was the Son of Man, the Pharisees would know that Jesus was referencing Daniel 7, which I will read to you now: ***“I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed”*** (Daniel 7:13–14, ESV).

This passage from Daniel is an apocalyptic passage referring to the end of history when all of the earth's empires will crumble before the kingdom of God. It is at that time, the Prophet Daniel says, that there will be one like a “son of man” to whom God – the Ancient of days – will give all dominion and glory and the right to rule. *So who is the “Son of Man”? The Son of Man is the one who stands at the end of history itself to judge the living and the dead and to rule as everlasting king.*

⁴ Wright. 60.

⁵ Ibid. 61.

So this is why the Pharisees jaws would have hit the floor. Jesus is in effect saying, the reason I can forgive this man of his sins is because I am the one who will stand as his judge at the end of time. And because I can forgive him then in eternity, I now have the authority to forgive him now on earth.⁶

And then, before the Pharisees can even catch their breath, this claim is then justified by Jesus' healing act: *"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 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" (Luke 5:23–25, ESV).

In our day and age, we are used to people – celebrities and politicians – making outrageous claims that they will never follow through on. Jesus is different. ***Jesus's words are not mere rhetoric. His divine claim is confirmed by his divine power. His divine right is justified by his divine might.*** And thus the Pharisees don't have a leg to stand on. To paraphrase an old pastor of mine: *"A person with a testimony of God's power is not a the mercy of someone with an philosophical argument."*

But even more astonishing is that in light of the whole gospel of Luke, Jesus will be revealed not only to be the Judge who stands at the end of history. Rather he will also be the Substitute who takes the justice and punishment for our sin by his death on the cross. And by the victory of his resurrection, he makes available his forgiveness not only to this paralyzed man, but to all who believe.

Everyone who witnesses this the power of Jesus has the same response of awestruck fear and worship: *"And amazement seized them all, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, 'We have seen extraordinary things today'"* (Luke 5:26, ESV). This should be our response as well.⁷

Community Group Discussion Questions

- 1) *Luke 5:17-26 includes Jesus's first encounter with the "Pharisees and teachers of the Law." Who are these Pharisees and what do you think caused their unbelief in Jesus? How might we find ourselves prone to the sin(s) of the Pharisees?*
- 2) *How does this passage give us a picture of Christian community? How should this passage encourage us to pray for one another, as well as those who do not yet know Jesus?*
- 3) *For Jesus to announce a man's sins are forgiven is a massive claim to authority. How does this claim to authority relate to the title "Son of Man" that Jesus uses to describe himself in this passage (see Luke 5:24 and Daniel 7:13-14)?*

⁶ "...Jesus claims to be the Son of man, and claims that the Son of man has authority to forgive sins, not merely when acting as heavenly judge, but also here and now on earth" I. Howard Marshall, [The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text](#), New International Greek Testament Commentary (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978), 216.

⁷ Ibid. 217.