

FORGIVES

Luke 5:17-26

Change usually brings resistance. Most people are fairly well satisfied with the situation in which they find themselves and are reluctant to change because of the unknown element of what the change will bring. Others are so dissatisfied that they will try any change regardless of the cost and still others are so satisfied that they will stop at nothing to keep change from happening. For the majority of people, there is the uncertainty of whether they will gain or lose that stops them from trying to create change. The group that is very dissatisfied figures that they have nothing to lose; therefore, they try to make change happen. Those who are very satisfied figure that they have everything to lose and try to stop change. Jesus encountered these three kinds of people during His ministry as He brought changes to the way the world operated.

Although many people followed Jesus and came to hear Him, the majority of people were reluctant to disrupt the status quo of their lives even though they heard about the great things that were happening. Of those that did come to Jesus, many knew they were in need of help in some area of their lives, others may have simply been curious and another group came to see if they could stop what was going on.

Hope Demonstrated – 5:17-19

¹⁷ One day He was teaching; and there were some Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting there, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem; and the power of the Lord was present for Him to perform healing. ¹⁸ And some men were carrying on a bed a man who was paralyzed; and they were trying to bring him in and to set him down in front of Him. ¹⁹ But not finding any way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down through the tiles with his stretcher, into the middle of the crowd, in front of Jesus. Luke 5:17–19 (NASB95)

People would come from the towns and villages nearby and in some of the latter passages in Luke he tells us that they came from as far as Tyre and Sidon, towns near the Lebanese border. People came to listen and learn because they wanted something better, people came to be healed because they were sick and hurting, and people came to criticize and gather evidence against Jesus. Luke describes this third group as “the Pharisees and doctors of the law.” These people were the religious leaders of their day and they would view change as a threat to their positions. They were not concerned that people were being helped, but were concerned about whether or not what Jesus taught was in accordance with their interpretation of the law. These critics (some of which were from Jerusalem) could be described as “heresy hunters” and they had likely recruited other “clergy” from the Galilean area to join them on their mission to find anything that would discredit this “upstart” young preacher.

They saw a lot which they interpreted as heresy; however, they ignored the evident differences that caused Jesus to be distinctive from other great teachers: people were healed at His touch and command. This significant distinction was not ignored by the people who had great needs.

Luke mentioned that the “power of the Lord was present for Jesus to heal.” This statement almost seems to imply that Christ’s “healing power” was intermittent. Most Bible scholars would not agree with that assessment but would point out that Luke was simply stating the obvious fact that Jesus’s power to heal was there because He is the Lord and it would always be with Him. However, we can recall the incident when Jesus was in His hometown of Nazareth and it was written that He could do no great work among them because of their unbelief. The emphasis here was likely that the cold disbelief of the Pharisees did not prevent Jesus from working miracles, as disbelief usually did. Even the “small faith” of the people who came to learn or to experience healing was more than sufficient to overwhelm the “great doubt” of the critics.

In this account, we also see a group of people who were eager for change to happen. The

four men who carried the small bed plus the sick man were so dissatisfied with the situation they saw and experienced that they were willing to do anything to help. This “anything” included the persistence of not letting the crowd keep them away from Jesus. Many people who needed help and some who were just curious were there that day in addition to the scribes and Pharisees. The four could not push their way through the crowd; however, their situation was so desperate that they could not settle for failure. They became very inventive and decided to go over the crowd if they could not go through the crowd. There is something to be learned here relative to persistence and desperation in bringing about change. So many times, our level of desperation is not high enough to give us the persistence to keep working to overcome obstacles. When we try to do something and we run into resistance, we have a choice of giving up or finding a way through, around or over the resistance. The choice we make is determined by how desperate we are to make the change. In their desperation, these four men took the roofing tiles off and lowered their friend into the room where Jesus was teaching.

Forgiveness Granted – 5:20-24

²⁰ Seeing their faith, He said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven you.” ²¹ The scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, “Who is this man who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?” ²² But Jesus, aware of their reasonings, answered and said to them, “Why are you reasoning in your hearts? ²³ “Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins have been forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk’? ²⁴ “But, so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,”—He said to the paralytic—“I say to you, get up, and pick up your stretcher and go home.” Luke 5:20–24 (NASB95)

Luke tells us that Jesus SAW their faith. How do we see faith? Faith is seen in the actions that people take. If they had not had faith that Jesus could help their friend, they would not have taken such drastic action. When Jesus saw the man on the bed that had been lowered into the room, He did not even address the obvious physical condition of the man. He looked past that to the need of each of us for forgiveness. Just as everyone who has ever lived needs forgiveness, this man did also. Some have speculated that the man may have had such guilt over the wrongs he had done that this had caused his paralysis. There are situations in which stress can be so great that people do experience severe debilitating physical problems. We do not know this was the case, but Jesus chose to first address the issue of forgiveness of sins. Since Jesus was capable of knowing the thought of people, He may have sensed that the paralytic man was concerned about sins in this life.

I wonder how the four friends felt when Jesus said, “Man, thy sins are forgiven thee?” They were probably disappointed. They were likely not overly concerned with the spiritual condition of their friend; they could only see his physical needs. Jesus was not ignoring the man’s physical condition but He was continuing to teach those that came to hear. We can probably find that every miracle that Christ did was also a teaching parable. Everyone there was not physically ailing; however, all had spiritual ills that needed healing. All were in need of forgiveness and it was likely all needed to forgive someone else.

This statement of Jesus regarding “sins forgiven” produced a lot of criticism among the critics. The religious authorities were both appalled and delighted at the same time. Appalled that anyone would presume that he could forgive sins and delighted in that they thought that Jesus had been caught in blasphemy. They began to think and perhaps discuss among themselves that Jesus was guilty of blasphemy because they knew that only God could forgive sins. What they did not know was that God was there in their midst. Jesus knew what they were thinking and discussing, but notice that He did NOT argue that someone else besides God could forgive sins and He did NOT deny that He had the power to do so, but in fact, demonstrated that it was true. This evidence (the healing) was an indirect witness that the man’s sins were forgiven. If this happening was not enough, then a second witness was there to confirm the first. That second witness was that Jesus knew their thoughts. Both these should have sent a strong message to these critics that this person was more than a rabbi or even a prophet.

Jesus was, at this point, telling the people that He is God. Most of the time Jesus referred to Himself as the Son of Man and did not go around telling people, “Hey, I’m God” in so many explicit words. It was in situations like this that He made statements that could only be interpreted that He claimed to be God.

How did the people there know that the man’s sins had been forgiven? You can’t know by just looking at someone. Therefore, the religious leaders could argue that it had not happened and would argue that just because Jesus said it did not mean that it was true.

Jesus then asked them a very interesting question: “Which is easier to say, ‘Thy sins be forgiven thee;’ or to say, ‘Rise up and walk?’” Both are difficult; however, through medical science some people have been helped with physical problems so that they could walk. On the other hand, no one on the human level has yet to come up with a solution to the problem of forgiveness of sins which are ultimately against God Himself. I think that what Jesus was saying was that He had not turned away from the harder and more important task of forgiveness of sins and was not going to concentrate only on people’s physical problems. The visible impossibility (miraculous healing) was a witness that the invisible deed (forgiveness of sin) had also happened. Both were divine acts, and that which could be verified by sight established the reality of that which could not. Actually, focusing only on the physical issues would have been an easier way out for Him. He would not have had the great opposition that eventually put Him on the Cross if He had addressed only the physical ills of the people and not come to grips with the root problem of humanity – man’s basic sinful nature.

Alexander MacLaren (circa 1850) noted in his commentary on this passage that

Social reformers need this lesson. Many voices proclaim many gospels today. Culture, economical or social reconstruction, is trumpeted as the panacea. But it matters comparatively little how society is organized. If its individual members retain their former natures, the former evils will come back, whatever its organization. The only thorough cure for social evils is individual regeneration. Christ deals with men singly, and remolds society by renewing the individual.

Here we are a century and a half later and we still haven’t learned nor implemented this truth. This must be the message of the church collectively and of each one of us, individually. We keep hearing of all the new ideas that will solve all the problems of the world such as the Great Reset, the New World Order, and the Fourth Industrial Revolution. All these will eventually fail to cure social evils unless people repent and turn to God for salvation.

In order to demonstrate that fact to the skeptics that the man’s sins had been forgiven, Jesus commanded him to get up and pick up his bed and return to his home. The miracles and signs and wonders that Jesus did served at least two purposes: the first was the compassion that Jesus had to relieve the suffering of the people and the second was to confirm the word that He spoke which validated His ministry to those that were witnesses to it.

Praise Offered – 5:25-26

²⁵ Immediately he got up before them, and picked up what he had been lying on, and went home glorifying God. ²⁶ They were all struck with astonishment and began glorifying God; and they were filled with fear, saying, “We have seen remarkable things today.” Luke 5:25–26 (NASB95)

The formerly-paralyzed man was obedient to the words of Jesus. We saw confirmation of the faith of the four men that brought him to Jesus and now we see validation of the faith of the sick man. Had he not had faith, then he would not have even tried to get up and would have remained in his paralyzed condition.

So many people today have heard the Good News that God has provided a means for individuals to be reconciled to Him through the forgiveness of their sins and yet they do not respond to God’s invitation to start a new life in Jesus Christ. We, who have experienced the healing of forgiveness, need to be like the four men who brought their friend to Jesus and bring others to Him so that they too may be made whole.