



Sunday School Lesson
Luke 5:17-26
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Jesus Healed a Man



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This passage of scripture comes as the final passage of the six week “Forty Days of Purpose” emphasis. The theme emphasis in the lesson material is on evangelism, in spite of the fact that this passage and very few others listed in the lesson materials directly relate to this theme. This is especially true, if the term ‘evangelism’ is understood in its traditionally narrow meaning of either preaching or verbally witnessing to a non-Christian with the purpose of leading that individual to confess Christ as Savior. But, as I contended in the initial lesson of this series, the way the Bible is treated in this material is very superficial, so much so that it only plays a minimal role for the study. The organizing mind of the lesson material writer is subtly put forth as the real authority. Thus, we will ignore “the tradition of men” (cf. [Mk. 7:8](#)) in favor of serious study of God’s Word.

The main passage in this material comes from Luke 5:17-26 and is a healing miracle narrative. It is also paralleled by Mark 2:1-12 and Matthew 9:1-8, which describe the identical event. We will take a look at the event mainly as Luke narrated it, but with additional insights gleaned from Mark and Matthew. This, especially since Luke most likely had at least a copy of Mark in front of him when he compiled his account.

I. Context

Once more, we will take a look initially at the settings of this passage, both historically and literally. Such is necessary for more accurate understanding of the passage and its religious meaning.

a. Historical

Two levels historical exploration are important to the interpretative process. *First*, we need to explore the composition of the gospel document this passage occurs in, and second we need to locate the occurrence of this event in the public ministry of Jesus. Both of these issues pose challenges, but honest study of scripture needs to learn as much as can be legitimately gleaned. This knowledge helps prevent distorted interpretation of the meaning of the scripture passage.

Regarding the compositional history of the Gospel of Luke, let me summarize a lot of Lukan scholarship by the following. William Beard in the *Interpreter’s One Volume Commentary on the Bible* (iPreach online) summarizes the basic issue this way: “According to tradition this gospel was written by Luke, ‘the beloved physician’ and travel companion of Paul (Col. 4:14; Philemon 1:24; 2 Tim. 4:11). Actually the tradition is not very old. It appears first in the writings of Irenaeus, who was a theologian living in Gaul during the latter part of the 2nd cent. The Muratorian fragment (ca. A.D. 200), a document which presents an official list of Christian scriptures, supports the same conclusion.” With the acceptance of this early church tradition -- although not all do and since the gospel itself makes no effort internally to identify its author -- then the issue becomes trying to locate a setting for the writing of this gospel. Again Bill Beard summarizes quite effectively these questions:

“The exact date and place of the writing of this gospel cannot be ascertained. Since the author uses Mark as a source and since he seems to have accurate knowledge of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans (19:41-

44; 21:20-24; see pp. 1029-31) he evidently wrote after A.D. 70. He must have written before 140, when his gospel was included in the canon of the heretic Marcion. Since the situation of the church reflected in the gospel fits well the political situation of the reign of the Emperor Domitian (81-96), a date from about 85 to 95 is most likely.

According to one tradition Luke wrote his histories in Rome. Another locates his writing in Greece. Since there is a correlative tradition that the evangelist died in one of the Greek provinces, this latter tradition has better support. Any of these locations assumes the traditional authorship and bears the same burdens. Perhaps all we can say is that the gospel was written from some locale where Greek was the primary language and where cultured readers like Theophilus (1:3) would be at home.”

According to [Luke 1:1-4](#), this gospel -- and subsequently the book of Acts (cf. Acts 1:1) -- were dedicated to a Theophilus who as a patron supported the cost of producing these documents as well as the making of copies of them for distribution to various Christian communities in the late first century world. Evidently [Theophilus](#) was a wealthy Roman who had become a Christian and wanted to contribute to the spread of Christianity by supporting Luke’s writing of these two documents. The gospel preface ([Lk 1:4](#)) suggests the purpose of the document was “so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.”

The Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts together stand as a two volume testimony of the beginning of the Christian religion with its founder, Jesus Christ, and the first three decades of the beginning of this movement in its spread from Jerusalem to Rome from AD 30 to AD 61. The author was closely associated with the apostle Paul. For the gospel account Luke made use of a variety of sources, as he indicated in [Lk 1:1-3](#), since he was not personally present with Jesus during his earthly ministry. Modern scholarship generally concludes that among these sources are the gospels of Mark and perhaps also Matthew, although more likely the material in Luke, that is also found in Matthew, may very well be drawn from a common, unknown source. That is generally called the Q document from the German word Quelle meaning source. Thus with at least Mark and Q in front of him, along with notes from interviews with various people around the earthly Jesus, Luke set out to tell his story of Jesus in a way that would enhance understanding of the enormous significance of this Jewish carpenter from the little village of Nazareth in the northern Palestinian province of Galilee. As best as we can determined, this happened sometime in the 70s or perhaps early 80s of the first Christian century, possibly while Luke was living in Rome.

The *second historical concern* emerges from inside the scripture passage itself. The nature of 5:17-26 is that of a narrative text describing a specific event that happened during the public ministry of Jesus, which extended from about AD 27 to AD 30. The three gospels, which record this event, uniformly place it in the beginning phase of Jesus’ public ministry in Galilee. Each synoptic gospel writer has his own distinctive sequence of events at this stage of Jesus’ ministry, but Luke followed the order of Mark more closely than did Matthew at this point, as is illustrated by the [summary chart](#) posted at Cranfordville.com. The chart below, indicates the broad sketch of Jesus’ activity in northern Palestine for most of the three plus years of public ministry. The pivotal turning points in the synoptic gospels especially are the choosing of the Twelve (ending phase one), and the execution of John the Baptizer (ending phase two). During the third segment, Jesus, although remaining in northern Palestine, spent very little time in the Roman province of Galilee where Herod had political power. The close of this period came with Jesus’ departure south to Jerusalem in anticipation of the Passover celebration in early spring of A.D. 30.

	<i>Matthew</i>	<i>Mark</i>	<i>Luke</i>	<i>John</i>
II. Galilean ministry				
	4:12-18:35 (51%)	1:14-9:50 (53%)	4:14-9:56 (24%)	4:46-7:9 (15%)
A. Phase One: To the Choosing of the Twelve	4:12-12:21	1:15-3:19a	4:14-7:50	4:46-5:47
B. Phase Two: To the Withdrawals from Galilee	12:22-14:12	3:19b-6:29	8:1-9:9	-
C. Phase Three: To the Departure to Jerusalem	14:13-18:35	6:30-9:50	9:10-56	6:1-7:9

Some insight can be gleaned by studying the sequential position of this event in each of the synoptic



<http://www.keyway.ca/htm2002/index.htm>

gospels. Matthew (8:28-34) places it (#54) right after the healing of the Gadarene demoniacs (#53) and the calming of the storm (#52) following the lengthy Sermon on the Mount (#20-47). See the sequential listing with each pericope numbered at Cranfordville.com.

Mark lists the events in the following sequence: #08 Preaching and Healing Tour in Galilee (1:35-39); #09 Leper cleansed (1:40-5); #10 Paralytic healed and forgiven (2:1-12); #11 Calling of Levi (2:13-17); #12 Question about fasting (2:18-22); #13 Plucking grain on the Sabbath (2:23-28); **#14 Man with withered hand healed (3:1-6)**; #15 Withdrawal and more healings (3:7-12); #16 The Twelve chosen (3:13-19a).

Luke follows the Markan sequence very closely: #25 Preaching tour in Galilee (4:42-44); #26 Four Fishermen called (5:1-11); #27 Leper Cleansed (5:12-16); **#28 Paralytic healed and forgiven (5:17-26)**; #29 Calling of Levi (5:27-32); #30 Question about Fasting; #31 Plucking grain on the Sabbath (6:1-5); #32 Man with withered hand healed; #33 The Twelve chosen (6:12-

16).

Luke is depending heavily on his Markan source for the narrating of the series of events during these beginning days of ministry by Jesus in Galilee. For Mark, these series of events underscore a dramatic ministry by Jesus who bursts on the scene with dramatic, powerful actions and words. Immediately, two very different reactions surface. The masses of people respond with enthusiasm but the religious authorities are threatened and respond with hostility. As the detailed study of the text will illustrate, while Luke followed Mark closely in narrating the same essential series of events during this period, he felt great freedom to re-work the narrative details in order to give his own interpretive perspective to the religious significance of the event. This grows out of each gospel writer's concern to interpret Jesus to their initially targeted readership, rather than merely write either a history or a biography of Jesus' life and ministry. Thus their work is labeled a gospel, rather than history or biography. Our task as Bible students is to seek to understand that interpretive significance from each gospel writing as best as we possibly can, since that interpretive significance forms the basis for any contemporary conclusions about the religious meaning of these texts.

b. Literary

The nature of this passage being in Luke's gospel tells us one thing right off the bat. What Jesus did that day in the healing of a paralyzed man has ongoing relevance and importance to us as twenty-first century followers of Jesus. The literary form labeled 'gospel' for this document means that the story of Jesus, although based in history and centered around the life's work of one character, is more than anything else intended to convey the ongoing religious relevance and importance of this individual to subse-

quent generations way beyond those who first read these words in the second half of the first Christian century. What he said and did on any occasion has abiding significance.

Additionally, this narrative is shaped in the form of a healing miracle narrative. Jesus performed a miracle and it stands as one of some thirty-five specific miracles recorded in all four gospels. For a detailed listing of these texts etc. see my study of them, [Jesus' Miracles](#) and [The Miracles of Christ](#), at Cranfordville.com under [Study Aids for New Testament Studies](#). Other miracles narratives are found scattered throughout the Bible, although with the New Testament they are found only in the four gospels and the Acts of the Apostles. For a listing in Acts see [my listing of them](#) at Cranfordville.com in the Study Aids page. But one would need to remember that miracles stories abound in ancient literature outside the New Testament. See a listing of representative examples at the [Ancient Miracle Stories](#) page on the internet. Thus to people in Jesus' time, the occurrence of miracles was nothing unusual to most people, both Jew and Gentile. For a very helpful background treatment see the [PBS study](#) by Prof. Michael White from Harvard University entitled, "Magic, Miracles and the Gospels." Thus, Jesus' ancient critics never questioned his ability to perform miracles; their criticism was based on other reasons. Our task, then, is to understand what Luke wants us to see about Jesus from this episode.

II. Message

Ancient miracles stories revolved typically around three basic elements: 1) what prompted the miracles; 2) the doing of the miracle; and 3) the impact of the miracle. Those elements are certainly present in Lk. 5:17-26. But additionally, a theological controversy explodes during the narrative over who can forgive sins. Thus, this narrative takes on an additional segment dealing with whether the earthly Jesus had the power to forgive a person's sin or not. The healing of the physical deformity is woven into this religious question.

Because the Lukan account is our focus, we will relate the other two texts to it as the organizing structure. For a listing of these texts in parallel columns with the Greek see [#7 Paralytic Through Roof](#) at Cranfordville.com; and for a listing of multiple parallel translations of the Lukan text see [Jesus Heals a Paralytic](#), also at Cranfordville.com

a. Bringing a Friend, vv. 17-19

Matt. 9:1-2a (NRSV)

1 And after getting into a boat he crossed the sea and came to his own town. 2 And just then some people were carrying a paralyzed man lying on a bed.

Mark 2:1-4 (NRSV)

1 When he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. 2 So many gathered around that there was no longer room for them, not even in front of the door; and he was speaking the word to them. 3 Then some people came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. 4 And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay.

Luke 5:17-19 (NRSV)

17 One day, while he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting near by (they had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem); and the power of the Lord was with him to heal. 18 Just then some men came, carrying a paralyzed man on a bed. They were trying to bring him in and lay him before Jesus; 19 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 middle of the crowd in front of Jesus.

Comments:

Immediately the distinctive viewpoint of each gospel writing becomes clear from the above texts. Matthew omits the mentioning of large crowds and the difficulty the friends had in getting their sick friend in to see Jesus. Matthew indicates that this event happened after Jesus had crossed the sea (of Galilee) and had returned to "his own town," which Mark indicates was Capernaum. Mark indicates that Capernaum

had become base headquarters for Jesus. Very likely this was Peter's home that was used for this purpose. See the above map for the exact location of [Capernaum](#) on the west side of the Sea of Galilee. Because Luke was writing to non-Jewish readers, he set the scene in verse seventeen with a mentioning of the Pharisees and scribes being present to listen and to watch. The Markan and Matthean narratives locate this as taking place in Jesus' home in Capernaum. Obviously these religious leaders were not present to learn something positive from Jesus or because they were sympathetic to him. Just the opposite. But they, as ancient custom dictated, were able to enter the home and observe Jesus.

Luke also stresses the power of God being present so that Jesus could heal (καὶ δύναμις κυρίου ἦν εἰς τὸ ἰᾶσθαι αὐτόν.). The power of God that enabled ministry is a frequent theme in Luke; see 1:35; 4:14, 36; 6:19; 8:46 and Acts 2:22 and 10:38. This is an important statement by Luke that makes the point that what Jesus did was through God's power, and thus within the Father's favor and with His blessing. Thus the narrative sets up tension: religious leaders with a hostile intent are present, but God is present with His blessing.

The teaching session is interrupted by the arrival of some men carrying a paralyzed friend on a stretcher. Mark mentions four individuals carried their friend (Mk. 2:3). When blocked from entering the house at the front entrance by a large crowd, these determined friends went up the outside stairs to the roof carrying their friend. Most homes in that world were flat top and the roof actually served as a place for entertaining guests in the evening hours. The exact nature of the man's disability is not spelled out, beyond the statement that he was a paralytic (ὃς ἦν παραλελυμένος). Not being able to walk, he was fortunate enough to have friends willing to carry him to a source of possible healing. These were persistent friends who went the extra step in order to get him before Jesus for healing. After removing the necessary tiles in the roof, they lowered him down in front of Jesus.

What can be learned from these verses? One thing that is clear, Jesus didn't let the presence of hostile people limit his ministry, both in teaching his convictions and in helping people. Our tendency today is to be intimidated by hostile people. None of us, especially as Christians, enjoys confrontation. But to let others with hostility to either us or our Christian convictions cause us to tone down or to hesitate to express our convictions is to not follow the example of Jesus. Jesus set an example for us; we must follow it. But there is another aspect here that needs to be mentioned. Jesus didn't carry a chip on his shoulder and go looking for a fight either. Sometimes Christians mistakenly assume that in order to be bold they must become obnoxious. Nothing is further from the truth!

Also, we can learn a lesson about caring for friends from this passage. No exact mention is made about how far these men carried their sick friend, although the Matthean and Markan texts seem to suggest that they lived in Capernaum. But whatever the distance, they carried him to where he could find healing. Their persistence in going up on the roof is a special point of stress in both Mark and Luke. These texts make the point that these friends really cared. Also, that they believed Jesus to be the solution to their friend's health problems. When we really care about people, we will follow the example of these men and bring our friends to Jesus as the solution to their problems as well.

b. Forgiveness of sin claimed, vv. 20-24

Matt. 9:2b-6 (NRSV)

When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven." 3 Then some of the scribes said to themselves, "This man is blaspheming." 4 But Jesus, perceiving their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts? 5 For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Stand up

Mark 2:5-11 (NRSV)

5 When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." 6 Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, 7 "Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" 8 At once Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were discussing these ques-

Luke 5:20-24 (NRSV)

20 When he saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven you." 21 Then the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, "Who is this who is speaking blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" 22 When Jesus perceived their questionings, he answered them, "Why do you raise such questions

and walk'? 6 But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he then said to the paralytic—"Stand up, take your bed and go to your home."

tions among themselves; and he said to them, "Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? 9 Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Stand up and take your mat and walk'? 10 But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the paralytic— 11 "I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home."

in your hearts? 23 Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Stand 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 one who was paralyzed—"I say to you, stand up and take your bed and go to your home."

Comments:

The heart of the narrative is found in these verses. Interestingly, all three gospels are virtually identical in this segment -- more so than either the preceding or the following segments. Here is where the miracle takes place and here is where the theological controversy erupts.

Jesus responded to the faith of not just the sick man, but also of his friends with the astounding declaration, "Friend, your sins are forgiven you" ("Ἀνθρώπε, ἀφέωνταί σοι αἱ ἁμαρτίαι σου."). Luke places a lot of emphasis upon faith as a basic response to a visitation of God in his writings: Lk. 7:9, 50; 8:12, 13, 25, 48,50; 16:11; 17:5, 6, 19; 18:8, 42; 20:5; 22:32, 67; 24:25; Acts 2:44; 3:16; 4:4, 32; 5:14 etc. [cf. Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, vol. 3 in *Sacra Pagina*, p. 93]. Thus Jesus opens up the spiritual issue before the physical issue, and then links them together. The far deeper healing needed by all is the spiritual cleansing of our sins. Jesus declared these men's faith to be the basis for this spiritual action for the sick man. Our highly individualized society creates barriers for us to see clearly the powerful effect of collective expression of faith that is exhibited here. Faith became the foundation for forgiveness. The [forgiveness](#) of sins [cf. also [forgive](#)] is another emphasis in Luke's gospel beginning with the declaration of the angel to Zechariah about John in 1:77, "76 And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, 77 to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins."

Jesus' declaration that the paralytic's sins were forgiven caused a sharp negative reaction. One important point is that the wording of the Greek text (ἀφέωνταί σοι αἱ ἁμαρτίαι σου) makes it clear that Jesus declared God's forgiveness on the man, rather than Jesus himself forgiving the man. Jesus forgave when something had been done against him. The sins here were against God. Here Jesus assumed the authority to declare God's forgiveness, which was a level of authority the religious leaders believed that God the Father had delegated to no one. Thus they were convinced he was guilty of blaspheming God, that is, slandering God's name by illegitimate claiming of divine authority. In Jewish law, this was a capital offense that led to stoning to death.

Jesus' perceptive reaction to their objection was to pose a challenge to them. Using the traditional light/heavy pattern of argumentation common among the scribes of that time, he declared that his ability to achieve the unseen spiritual healing (heavy) was linked to his ability to achieve the very visible physical healing (light). If he couldn't do the visible miracle, then the invisible spiritual miracle wouldn't take place either. Quite fascinatingly, Jesus placed his credibility on the line here before not only his enemies but before the crowd present in the room watching. His claim was additionally predicated on his being [the Son of Man](#), a term with messianic meaning for about three hundred years at this point in time.

Jesus then turned to the man and simply spoke authoritatively the words, "I say to you, stand up and take your bed and go to your home" (Σοὶ λέγω, ἔγειρε καὶ ἄρας τὸ κλινίδιον σου πορεύου εἰς τὸν οἶκόν σου.). In ancient miracle narratives, often some magical, secretive words had to be spoken before a miracle took place. Not so with Jesus, his power was open and clear for all to see. God's power was in his spoken words. He didn't need to touch the man for that power to transfer to the man. His words were enough.

What can we learn from this? Several things. *First*, faith and forgiveness of sins are linked. Authentic faith evident in actions is essential. Superficial faith that doesn't prompt one to action won't 'cut the mustard,' as [James 2:14-26](#) makes clear. *Second*, forgiveness of sin is foundational to one's spiritual healing. If we don't get our sinfulness before a righteous God resolved, then our eternal destiny in damnation is unavoidable. *Third*, God is interested in all of us, not just our souls. Jesus linked spiritual and physical healing in this passage. Our modern scientific, western rationalistic way of thinking has often driven a wedge between these two aspects of human existence. The ancient Jewish world, and Jesus especially, exhibited a broader view of spiritual and physical wholeness being but two parts of a larger picture. No cause and effect relationship between the spiritual and the physical can be read into this. [John 9:1-7](#) makes that clear. Instead, the view was simply that God is interested in the total person. This challenges any form of so-called evangelism that cares only for the 'soul' of the lost person. Jesus cared about every aspect of our existence, and would lead us into healing of any deficiency. One must, however, remember that physical healing doesn't always take place in this life. Paul's thorn in the flesh etc. are clear reminders. God may choose to use physical problems as a channel of his grace in order to bring us closer to himself. But even in such situations, He still cares and supplies whatever is needed to cope. *Fourth*, we can learn some humility from the religious leaders in this passage. They arrogantly assumed complete knowledge of God's will revealed in scripture, while exposing just how little they really knew about God and his workings in this world. Humility and an openness to hear God through His Word can help us avoid serious misjudgments and mistakes.

c. Unforgettable Impact, vv. 25-26

Matt. 9:7-8 (NRSV)

7 And he stood up and went to his home. 8 When the crowds saw it, they were filled with awe, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to human beings.

Mark 2:12 (NRSV)

12 And he stood up, and immediately took the mat and went out before all of them; so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

Luke 5:25-26 (NRSV)

25 Immediately he stood up before them, took what he had been lying on, and went to his home, glorifying God. 26 Amazement seized all of them, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, "We have seen strange things today."

Comments:

Luke has the most detailed depiction of impact, both on the paralytic and on the bystanders. With the words of healing spoken to him, the paralyzed man then got up, picked up the mat that he had been carried in on, and went home. Matthew is less interested in detail here than either Mark or Luke. Luke adds the exclusive note that the man went home glorifying God (ἀπῆλθεν εἰς τὸν οἶκον αὐτοῦ δοξάζων τὸν θεόν.). How grateful he must have been to be able to walk again. Years of having to be carried everywhere by others were history. Now he could manage on his own and provide for his own. He was free.

This man's action before the crowd of people gathered that day was clear proof that Jesus was who he claimed to be. No one could at that moment at least challenge him. He had put himself and his credibility on the line and then clearly demonstrated that he was authentic in a very public manner with numerous witnesses. Nothing is said about the religious leaders' reaction. The larger picture of them in all four gospels is consistently that on each occasion when they could have seen God at work in Jesus, they rejected what their eyes were seeing and became increasingly determined to get rid of this Jesus of Nazareth, who posed a danger to them.

The crowd's reaction was just the opposite. They too glorified God for the man's healing. Amazement at what they witnessed swept over them and prompted the glorifying of God (καὶ ἐκστασις ἔλαβεν ἅπαντας καὶ ἐδόξαζον τὸν θεόν). Then in typical Lukan parallelism, fear prompted them to declare that they had witnessed strange things (καὶ ἐπλήσθησαν φόβου, λέγοντες ὅτι εἶδομεν παράδοξα σήμερον.). The Greek adjective παράδοξος means something remarkable, or contrary to the expected, not something weird.

Certainly we can learn from these verses to be sensitive to God's actions.