

“Faith of the Persistent”

Lesson Text: Luke 5:17-26

Background Scripture: Luke 5:17-26

Devotional Reading: John 4:4-18

Luke 5:17-26 (NIV)

¹⁷ One day Jesus was teaching, and Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there. They had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal the sick. ¹⁸ Some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. ¹⁹ 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.

²⁰ When Jesus saw their faith, he said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven.”

²¹ 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?”

²² 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’? ²⁴ But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” So he said to the paralyzed man, “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.” 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.”

TODAY’S LESSON AIMS

- **Learning Facts:** To identify the correct and incorrect conclusions of the teachers of the law and the Pharisees.
- **Biblical Principle:** To know that God rewards faithfulness.
- **Daily Application:** To live a life devoted to serving God by serving others.

INTRODUCTION

Imposter Friends

Words and their definitions seem to change all the time. In recent years, discussions on blogs and opinion pieces have focused on defining the word friend in the age of social media. Is it possible for a person to have thousands of “friends”? Is it possible to be friends with someone you have never met in person? Many so-called friends on social media are criminals hiding behind fictitious names! They are imposters.

I have found a simple way to identify one’s genuine friends: announce that you are moving and see who volunteers to help. My wife and I have moved more than 10 times during our 22 years of marriage. Surprisingly, we have had no more than five people who have helped us pack and load the trucks. By contrast, I have over 300 “friends” on social media. Today’s lesson allows us a first-century look at the results of authentic, Christ-honoring friendship.

LESSON CONTEXT

The third Gospel and the book of Acts were written by a man named Luke. He was a traveling companion of the apostle Paul and a physician by profession (see Colossians 4:14; 2 Timothy 4:11; Philemon 24). Because Luke was not an eyewitness to the ministry of Jesus (Matthew 10:2-4), he carefully investigated his information from those who had been so he could write a

detailed account (see Luke 1:1–4). Most students believe that the Gospel of Mark was written first and, therefore, could have been one of the sources used by Luke. The scene in today's lesson is worded quite similarly to Mark 2:1–12 (also compare Matthew 9:1–8).

Today's lesson locates Jesus in Galilee, early in His three-and-a-half-year ministry. His popularity was rising, and He was drawing crowds. The news of Jesus' teaching and miracles was spreading rapidly (Luke 4:37) and attempts to keep things under control in that regard didn't work (5:14–15). As a result, Jesus had to make a conscious effort to carve out some "alone time" for prayer with His heavenly Father (4:42; 5:16).

Luke 5:12 states that the healing miracle just prior to the one in today's text occurred "in one of the towns." Mark 2:1 is more specific in indicating that the events of today's lesson took place in Capernaum. This town, located on the northwestern bank of the Sea of Galilee, became something of a headquarters for Jesus during His tours of Galilee (Matthew 4:13).

Faith That Seeks: Luke 5:17-20a

Jesus' prior healing of a man with leprosy (also see Mark 1:40-45) is the backdrop for the great controversy that begins today's story which began to develop between Christ and the Jewish religious leaders. Luke noted in verse 17 of today's lesson that some of those leaders had come from as far away as Jerusalem, some 80 miles distant!

These Jewish leaders were *Pharisees and teachers of the law* (also known as scribes). The Pharisees and scribes opposed Jesus (examples: Luke 11:53–54; John 11:45–57) specifically on their distinctive beliefs and practices, see Matthew 23:1–36; Mark 7:3–5; and Luke 18:10–12. For these religious leaders to commit to such a trip reveals a determined intent that the person and work of Jesus required a thorough investigation. The Pharisees and scribes picked a good time to attend one of Jesus' teachings, because God's power was present in a special way and Jesus would heal a man who was paralyzed.

1. Why were the Pharisees and teachers of the law present while Jesus taught? (Luke 5:17)

The crowd was so great around the house where Jesus was that a paralyzed man was unable to come to Jesus himself, but he was fortunate enough to have four friends who were able to get him to Jesus. These four determined men lowered the paralyzed man through a makeshift hole that they opened in the roof! These four men are examples of how friends ought to minister to one another and help needy sinners come to the Savior.

To begin with, they had faith that Jesus would heal him (Luke 5:20a); and it is faith that God honors. Their love for the man united them in their efforts so that nothing discouraged them, not even the crowd at the door. (How tragic it is when spectators stand in the way of people who want to meet Jesus.) As previously stated, when they could not get in at the door, they went on the roof, removed the tiling, and lowered the man on his mat right in front of the Lord!

The helping action of the friends of a man which was taken with a palsy is selfless and authentic. In their effort, the friends show what Jesus called the second greatest commandment: love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:39; Mark 12:31). This account does not specify how many men are carrying the bed, but Mark 2:3 does: there are four. This makes sense when we imagine something like a medical stretcher with one person at each corner.

The religious leaders' determination to investigate Jesus (Luke 5:17a, above) was matched (maybe even surpassed) by the determination of four men to have the suffering man healed by Jesus. This verse reads quite similarly to its parallel in Mark 2:4.

2. What other determined men came to see Jesus? What was their purpose and situation upon arrival? (Luke 5:18-20a)

What Do You Think?

How will you demonstrate the second greatest commandment (see Matthew 22:39; Mark 12:31) toward a friend in need in the upcoming week?

Digging Deeper

Who might you recruit to help you in this regard?

Faith that Finds: Luke 5:20b-26

The paralyzed man was also included as having faith that Jesus would heal him, as he was at least a consenting party to the action of his four friends. It's likely that he was more than willing to seek out Jesus. Jesus loved to see men act in faith, and thus responded: "Friend, your sins are forgiven."

3. How did Jesus reward the men's faithfulness? (Luke 5:20b)

What Do You Think?

In what ways do a believer's actions reveal his or her faith in God?

Digging Deeper

How do Hebrews 11:1–12:3 and James 2:14–26 inform you of the connection between faith and action?

Jesus words were also calculated to draw a particular reaction from the unbelieving Jews present.

Jesus was silently accused of blasphemy. This unspoken question of the religious experts goes to the heart of understanding the person and work of Jesus. The experts actually had a good grasp of what was happening: Jesus was speaking and acting in a manner reserved for God. For a mere human to forgive sins committed against God would indeed be blasphemy, which was punishable by death (Leviticus 24:16). But they failed to consider the possibility that Jesus was indeed God! The omniscient Christ read their very thoughts. He pointed out that it would be easy for someone to say that another's sins were forgiven. No one could prove any differently. But the harder thing would be to heal a person bedridden with palsy.

4. What were the Pharisees and scribes thinking when they heard Jesus say He forgave the man of his sins? (Luke 5:21-23)

What Do You Think?

How can you prepare yourself for others' questions regarding the identity and authority of Jesus?

Digging Deeper

What steps do you need to take to be successful in this regard?

Everyone present could see the evidence of the faith of the man and his friends in their actions. Jesus, however, was able to see the doubt and lack of faith in the hearts of the religious leaders. Jesus could have simply healed the man and sent him home, but instead, He used the opportunity to teach a lesson about sin and forgiveness. Jesus speaking to the paralyzed man said, "But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins... I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home."

"Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God."

The man's sudden ability to walk was (or should have been) evidence that Christ had both authority and power to forgive sins (see Luke 20:2–8). The statement before them is essential to this proof—everyone present saw the result. In biblical times two or three witnesses were required to prove the veracity of an event (Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15; Matthew 18:16; John 8:13–18; 2 Corinthians 13:1). Thus, Luke confirms that a sufficient number of witnesses were present to verify the miracle.

5. What did Jesus do next? (Luke 5:24-25)

What Do You Think?

How do you ensure that worship is your first response when you experience God's work?

Digging Deeper

How do you maintain an attitude of worship even when it seems God has not worked in the manner that you desired?

The crowd was "amazed" at the miracle Jesus just performed! Evidently this reaction of the multitude was that the charge of blasphemy had been disproved. Jesus was vindicated; God was glorified!

But even more than receiving healing, the man experienced forgiveness and the start of a whole new life. Our Lord's miracles not only demonstrated His deity and His compassion for needy people, but they also revealed important spiritual lessons about salvation. They were "object lessons" to teach spiritually blind people what God could do for them if only they would believe in His Son.

6. How did the crowd react to the healing of the paralyzed man? (Luke 5:26)

CONCLUSION

Authentic Friends

Social media has changed the world's concept of friendship. Only time will tell whether a new word is needed to distinguish between a virtual social-media friend and an authentic real-life friend. In the meantime, I will continue to post online as we prepare for our next move and patiently wait for my 300 so-called friends to show up. lol

The friends in today's lesson remind us of the nature of authentic friendship. We are unsure how long they had been carrying their friend around on this bed. We know that when Jesus came into the city, they believed He could help their friend. However, they did not stop at simply believing. They put their faith into action and brought their friend to Jesus, overcoming every obstacle on the way.

It was not an easy task to get their friend onto the roof, tear it apart, and lower him into the room. Undoubtedly, they could have spent their time on other matters that day. How can you dedicate your time and resources to assisting a friend in need?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we are grateful for the friends who have helped us on our faith journey. We pray that You will help us be the friend who carries the bed of another when needed, regardless of the obstacles in our path. We give You thanks for friends and the strength to be a friend in Jesus' name. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER God enables us daily to be faithful friends!

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

Next week's lesson is "Faith of a Centurion" where we learn why Jesus was amazed by his faith. Study Luke 7:1–10.