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Luke 5:17-26

WHO IS JESUS?

This morning as we enter the third week of Lent, I want to ask you the question, **Who is Jesus?** I want you to ponder that question for a moment. **What is the most important fact about who is Jesus?** If you could state one fact about Jesus that made Him who He was, what would it be? Maybe if you were to ask your family members or friends many of them might say that Jesus was a good man. Or He was a gifted teacher, and those things are certainly true about Jesus, but they're not the most important thing about Him. Jesus was much more than a good man or a gifted teacher.

In some churches today, it has become popular to think of Jesus as a social activist and they preach a social gospel. They present Jesus as a man who went about righting wrongs, feeding the hungry, healing the sick, uplifting the depressed. In fact, I have spoken on those things the past few weeks. And again, Jesus did do these things. He even went against the customs and traditions of his day by healing and performing miracles on the Sabbath.

Then again, many would say that Jesus was the Messiah. That he is the Savior. Jesus gives eternal life to those who believe in Him. Now, I would agree that these are the most important things that Jesus does. He saves people from the sins. Luke 19:10 says that Jesus came into the world to save sinners. He gives eternal life to people who put their faith and trust in Him. What could be more important than that. **But, these are things that Jesus does.** What Jesus does is not who Jesus is. The question was: What is the most important thing about **who** is Jesus?

At one of our session and deacon retreats that we had last year, I asked the question, who is your favorite author. And when it was my time to share, I said that one of my favorite authors is C.S. Lewis. One of the first books that I read as a new believer was from C.S. Lewis's book *Mere Christianity*. **And in that book, he says that the most important thing about Jesus is that He is God.** And that is exactly right. Those of you who have read *Mere Christianity* know what I am talking about. Lewis has that famous section in his book where he refutes the idea that Jesus was just a good man, or just a good teacher. He says that if this is all that Jesus was, then He was not a good man, or a good teacher. If Jesus was just human,

the claims Jesus made about Himself would have made Him a liar or a lunatic. He must be God, or He is the biggest liar, the greatest madman and the most successful con-artist in all of history. Jesus cannot be just a good man. Jesus cannot be just a good teacher. Jesus cannot be just a social activist or a political revolutionary. Jesus cannot be just a healer or a prophet. He has to be God, or He is none of these things.

So, the most important thing about who Jesus is, is that He is God. In Matthew 16:15-16, Jesus asked Peter, **who do you say that I am, and Peter responded, "You are the Christ, the son of the living God."**

That is what we are going to see as we turn to this morning's passage of Scripture. If you have your Bibles with you, will you turn with me please to Luke 5:17-26 and Let's Unpack this passage:

The scene is set for us in Luke 5:17-19.

1. The Setting (5:17-19)

¹⁷One 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.

So we read here in verse 17 that **Pharisees and teachers of the law** from **every village of Galilee, and from Judea and Jerusalem.** Word of Christ's ministry and miracles had spread, and the religious ruling class had heard rumors about Christ's teachings and the way the crowds flocked to hear Him. **So now** these religious leaders are coming to hear Him for themselves in order to determine whether they should accept and encourage Him, or accuse and condemn Him. At this point, they have all gathered, not to learn from Him, but to pass judgment upon Him.

Now, the Pharisees were the legalistic law keepers and one of the things they loved to do was go around and try to find people who were not living as the Pharisees thought they should, or who were teaching something contrary to their teachings. Undoubtedly, that was why they had gathered to hear Jesus. They were professional sermon critics, and they were here to make a decision about Jesus. He had not been trained in their schools. He had not received their stamp of approval. And so now they have all come from Galilee, Judea and Jerusalem to determine who this Jesus is and what they should do about Him.

Maybe you have the same questions about Jesus. Who is Jesus? What should I do with Jesus? These are the most important questions you can get answers for in your entire life. When you die and stand before God in heaven, the very first thing God will want to know is what you did with Jesus. Did you accept Him for who He was and what He said? Or did you reject Him? Did you believe in Him for eternal life, or did you trust in yourself and your own good works? Maybe you are like these religious leaders and you are trying to learn who Jesus is. Jesus is about to show us who He is. So verse 17 says, **And the power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal the sick.**

Luke, because he is a physician, is emphasizing the healing ministry of Jesus. Let me ask you a question. If you were trying to cram as many people as possible into the house in order to hear and see Jesus, would you have them stand, or have them sit? You would have them stand of course. A standing person takes up less room than a sitting person. But look at verse **17! The Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting!** Why was this? Well, you must understand that in Jewish culture at that time, it was the teachers who sat, and the students who stood. Today, this is reversed. You go to school, and the students sit while the teacher stands. Even here in church. I am standing up here, you are sitting. But in Jewish culture, the teacher sat and the students stood. **Do you want to try that today, I'll sit and you stand for the next 20 minutes and listen, okay?**

So the Pharisees and teachers of the law come to hear Jesus, but they don't come to learn from Him. No, they sit. Although more people could fit into the house if they stood, they will not stand, because they want to be in the position of authority. They want to appear like they are in control. They don't want to learn. They want to teach. And so they sit.

Do you see the scene? Jesus is sitting on one side of the room. The Pharisees are sitting on the other. They both are sitting. It's kind of a "standoff" between the two. But then something happens which destroys all the dignity of the Pharisees. Something happens which gets them to stand up and scurry. It is actually very humorous to picture what happens next.

I know all of you have read or heard this story before, but stop for a minute and imagine the scene. Look down at the end of verse 26. After the events that happen here, **²⁶Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, "We have seen remarkable things today."** This was the craziest, most comical thing that had probably ever happened in this town, and people couldn't stop talking about it. Follow me into the house where Jesus was teaching that day. Try to imagine yourself sitting there in the house, watching the events unfold.

We don't know whose house it is. It could have possibly been the home Jesus' family, it could have belonged to Peter or one of the other disciples. Maybe it belonged to one of the religious rulers. Whoever it belonged to, Jesus was there teaching in the main room. The religious rulers, because of their positions of authority, were those who filled the house. They had come from all over Israel to hear what Jesus had to say, and so they were in the room with Jesus. They were all serious.

Very dignified. Very authoritative. They are here to correct and teach Jesus if necessary. Who was this upstart, young man claiming to be a teacher of the Word? He was only 30 years old, but He had gained quite a following. They would have to put a leash on Him if they were going to control Him. He hadn't actually said anything blasphemous yet, but He did have some dangerous teachings about the law and the grace of God. They were just getting ready to question and challenge Jesus on some of his ideas when they hear a bit of a disturbance in the crowd outside. Verse 18;

18 Some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus.

Here are these men, carrying another man on a makeshift pallet through a standing-room-only crowd. It is causing quite a clamor. The Pharisees are having trouble hearing Jesus because of the ruckus. Some of them get visibly annoyed by the noise. They are trying to question Jesus. Why would somebody be so rude as to disrupt the proceedings? These men carrying the pallet don't seem to even care that they are causing a disturbance. But then the men carrying the pallet see stairs leading up to the rooftop. Jewish homes often had these stairs on the outside of their homes. The roofs were flat so that people could go and sleep up there on hot nights if they wanted to. And so this is where the men with the pallet head. Vs. 19;

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.

Luke just summarizes what happens here, the roof was flat, and most likely made of timbers, covered with sticks and mud, and laid over with rock tile. So to get through, they lifted up the tile, then dug a hole through the sticks and dried mud.

So here are the Pharisees. They are trying to hear what Jesus says. First there is a disturbance in the crowd that goes all around the house. Then, whoever is causing the noise, goes up the stairs on the side of the house. It

is obvious they are having trouble getting up the very narrow stairs because you hear people shout things like, "You're dropping him! Lift the back up more! Watch out!"

Maybe the paralyzed man shouts: "**Guys, I don't know if this is worth it. Just take me home. Don't drop me! I'd rather be alive and paralyzed than dead!**"

Finally, they get up on the roof, and there is all this scraping and pounding as they pull up the tiles of the roof and push them to the side. Jesus has stopped teaching, and is watching the scene unfold with interest and a bit of amusement himself. Then the pounding and digging begins, and all of a sudden, dirt and sand and twigs begin to drop out of the ceiling onto the Pharisees below. So far, they've been trying to remain dignified and calm. But now many of them jump up out of their seats, and angrily brush the dirt off their robes. The owner of the house is getting angry too. He is more concerned about the roof of his house than the dirt on your clothes. All the while, Jesus continues to sit there with a small smile on his face and a twinkle of amusement in his eyes.

Finally, the men get their hole dug, and wonder of wonders, they lower the pallet through the hole in the roof. There is a man on the pallet who is paralyzed, and several times, it looks like he is about to fall off the pallet, but he makes it safe to the floor of the room, right in front of Jesus. **Okay, so now we see the work of the Savior:**

2. The Savior (5:20)

Everybody expects Jesus to heal the man, but Jesus does something else entirely. Something completely unexpected. Something entirely shocking. Jesus looks down at him, then up at the men peering through the hole in the roof. And in verse 20 we read,

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

Notice that it is not just the faith of the paralyzed man that Jesus saw, but the faith of the men who brought him also. (this is what we saw last Sunday as Jesus healed the servant of the Centurion) Now certainly, the paralyzed man had faith, but the text says that Jesus **saw the faith of his friends**. Do you know what this means for us? You and I can help save our friends and neighbors and relatives. Ultimately, it is they who must place their own faith in Jesus Christ for eternal life, but often times, **it is our faith in God that brings them before Jesus**.

Do you believe that Jesus can help your friends and family members? Do you believe that Jesus is what they need? Although they may seem like they are doing okay most of the time, the truth is that they are paralyzed by sin, and they desperately **need you** to bring them to Jesus. That is what we see happening here. This man is paralyzed and his friends bring him to Jesus. They realized that their paralyzed friend needed Jesus, and they were willing to do anything to get him there. They believed, they had faith that Jesus could heal their friend. And so, they go to great lengths to make sure their paralyzed friend meets Jesus. Now, we can assume that they brought their friend to Jesus to be healed. But look what Jesus says to the man. **He said to him, "Man, your sins are forgiven you."**

This is not what anybody expected to hear. This is not what anybody wanted to hear. The men on the roof were probably visibly disappointed. They brought the man to Jesus for healing, not to have his sins forgiven. The man on the pallet is crushed also. He wanted to be healed, not to have his sins forgiven. Jesus knew what they had come for, but He knew what was more important. **He knew that spiritual healing was more important than physical healing.** A lot of people come to Jesus for things that they think are important. They want help with their depression. They want help from God with their finances. They want God to give them a job. They want God to give them healing. They want God to help with their marriage. They want God to give them direction about life.

There is nothing wrong with these things, but Jesus knows that there is something more important than any of these. Though we all want a variety of things from God, Jesus knows that what we really need is the forgiveness of sins. This paralyzed man was brought to Jesus to get healed of paralysis. But Jesus gave him something much better - the forgiveness of sins.

Jesus would rather say, "Your sins are forgiven you" than "Your sickness is removed from you." He may heal you, or He may not, but the most important thing you must determine is whether you are forgiven. That forgiveness comes from Jesus.

Of course, many people were shocked and offended by what Jesus says here. Those who are most shocked are the Pharisees. They stare at him wide-eyed. Many of them gasp. They finally received the answer they were looking for, but they didn't expect to receive it so clearly. They came trying to figure out what kind of teacher Jesus was, and now He has plainly told them. In their minds, He is a blasphemous teacher. This is the sentence they pronounce upon him in verse 21.

3. The Sentence (5:21)

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?"

The Pharisees correctly understood the claim that Jesus was making. They came to find out who Jesus was, and He has given them their answer. By forgiving the man's sins, **Jesus was saying, "I am God."** And so the scribes and Pharisees condemn Jesus as a blasphemer. They are correct in saying that only God can forgive sins. You see, ultimately, all sin is sin against God. Sure, we sin against our spouses, and against our neighbors and against our parents. And when we sin against them, they can forgive us of that sin. But that sin is also a sin against God, and we must be forgiven by God as well.

But imagine what a shock it would be if someone comes and steals your car, and when the culprit is caught, I went to them and said, "Don't worry about it. I forgive you." You would say, "Hey! It's not your place to forgive. This guy sinned against me, not against you, and so you can't forgive him. Only I can if I choose to." But that is essentially what Jesus is doing here. He is forgiving this paralyzed man of his sins when it is not his place to forgive...**unless He is God.**

And that is what the Pharisees say here. **Who can forgive sins but God alone?** They are thinking, "Jesus is speaking blasphemy! He's claiming to be God!" This is the sentence they pronounce upon Him, and look how Jesus responds in verses 22-24.

4. The Syllogism (5:22-24)

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."

Anyone can claim to forgive sins. Anyone can say, "Your sins are forgiven." And it is impossible from our human perspective to know if they are forgiven or not. Forgiveness of sins is invisible. So Jesus sets out to prove that He has the authority to forgive sins. He sets out to prove that He is God. To show them all that He has power on earth to forgive sins, He tells the paralyzed man to get up, take his bed, and go home. You see, if Jesus

had truly blasphemed God, God would not perform this miracle through Him. If Jesus had commanded the healing, and the healing did not happen, everybody would have known that He was a fraud, an imposter, a fake, a false teacher. But if Jesus truly was who He said He was, then this miracle would happen, and Jesus would prove that He was God come in the flesh.

And of course, in verse 25, the paralyzed man received sensation in his arms and legs.

5. The Sensation (5:25)

²⁵ Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God.

Immediately, the man is healed. This healing proved that identity of Jesus. He is not just a man. He is not just a teacher. He is not just a prophet. He is God come in the flesh. **He has the authority to forgive sins, and He proved it by healing the paralyzed man.** And now the man, with feeling in his arms and legs and toes and fingers, goes home, glorifying God. How could he not glorify God after what had happened to him. Not only was he freed from paralysis, but he was freed from the greater burden of sin. Paralysis kept him from moving, but sin had him chained to death. Now he was free from both. Now, he had both physical and spiritual sensitivity. And because of it all, he glorified God.

And look at the response of the crowd in verse 26. Look what they said about this event.

6. The Sayings (5:26)

²⁶ Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, "We have seen remarkable things today."

There are always mixed responses to Christ's teachings and miracles. This time is no different. Everybody is amazed, and they glorify God, but at the same time, they are filled with fear and keep on saying that they have seen remarkable things. The truth is they don't know quite how to react. The Pharisees and teachers of the law eventually conclude that Jesus is not God, but is instead using the power of the devil to perform miracles. Some of the people believe in Jesus for eternal life. Some of them just follow him around for a while seeking for more healings and miracles. Some of them turn on Jesus and side with the religious rulers.

What is your response to Jesus? Who do you say that He is? Is He God come in the flesh, or is He just some man with good morals and teachings? And if you believe that He is God, have you believed in Him for eternal life? Have you trusted in Him alone for the forgiveness of sins? There is no other way to have your sins forgiven. **The most important thing about who Jesus is, is that He is God.**