

The Faith of Four Friends

Lesson for April 7, 2024

Unit II: The Measure of Faith

Adult Topic: Helping A Friend in Need

Background Scripture: Luke 5:17-26

Printed Text: Luke 5:17-26

Key verse: “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.” (Luke 5:17-18, NIV)

A British publication once offered a prize for the best definition of a friend. Among the thousands of answers received were the following:

“One who multiplies joys, divides grief, and whose honesty is inviolable.”

“One who understands our silence.”

“A volume of sympathy bound in cloth.”

“A watch that beats true for all time and never runs down.”

The winning definition read: "A friend is the one who comes in when the whole world has gone out."

Bits and Pieces, July, 1991.

In this week’s lesson, “Jesus celebrated the faith and tenacity of the four friends who helped another friend find healing and wholeness.” (Sunday School Commentary, 2023-2024, Townsend Press, p. 287)

Key Terms

1. **Forgiven** (verse 23) – To cease to feel resentment against (an offender); pardon; remitted; yielded up; put/sent away.
2. **Heal** (verse 17) – To make free from injury or disease; to make sound or whole; to make well again; cure.
3. **Paralyzed** (verse 24) – Rendered incapable of movement or action; affected with paralysis.
4. **Pharisees** (verse 17) – A member of a Jewish sect of the intertestamental period noted for strict observance of rites and ceremonies of the written law and for insistence on the validity of their own oral traditions concerning the law.

Lesson Background

Early church traditions universally credit both this Gospel and the book of Acts to Luke. Luke is described as a Gentile, as well as a doctor. These traits seem to influence the writing of the Gospel of Luke, which prominently features healings, the plight of women and children, a scholarly style, and a consistently non-Jewish perspective on places and events.

Luke was a traveling companion of Paul (Acts 16:10) and a physician (Colossians 4:14). Unlike Matthew, Mark, and John, Luke writes his gospel as an historian, rather than as a first-hand eyewitness. Luke is most likely the only Gentile (non-Jewish) author of New Testament writing, emphasizing God's plan for all people. He wrote to Theophilus (Luke 1:1 - 4), likely an early Christian who supported Luke's written work. As a Gentile as well as a doctor prior to becoming a Christian missionary, Luke's writing is very detailed, based on many eyewitness accounts, with a particular emphasis on healings and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Luke is one of the larger books in the New Testament, with 24 chapters covering five major themes. Its express purpose is to provide fact-checked information about Jesus Christ.

Luke began his Gospel by comparing Jesus' and John the Baptist's early lives and recording Jesus' qualifications for ministry (Luke 1:1—4:13). He then started his account of Jesus' Galilean Ministry (Luke 4:14—9:50). This included a quick introduction of the way Jesus ministered—by expelling demons, healing, and teaching—and a preview of the negative responses He would face (Luke 4:14–44).

Although Luke has carefully placed his Gospel within the context of history (Luke 3:1–2), his record is not meant to be strictly chronological. His "orderly account" (Luke 1:3) is largely thematic. Though biblical scholars have labeled Luke 4:14—9:50 Jesus' "Galilean Ministry," not all of the events occur within the borders of Galilee. The title differentiates this period from Jesus' Travelogue to Jerusalem (Luke 9:50—19:27) and the events that occur in and near Jerusalem (Luke 19:28—24:53).

Having given examples of Jesus' authority over demons, disease, and the message of the kingdom of God, Luke records how Jesus carefully chooses His first disciples. Jesus already met Andrew and Peter on the banks of the Jordan River not far from Jericho (John 1:35–42). Jesus uses Peter's boat to teach. He then instructs him to go into deeper water and fish. The massive haul which results threatens to sink two boats. This obvious miracle causes Peter to repent, leave everything, and follow Jesus. Jesus promises that Peter—and his brother Andrew (Mark 1:16–18)—will now "fish" for men. James and John soon follow (Luke 5:1–11).

Luke next turns to two controversial miracles that begin to reveal who Jesus is. In the first, a man with severe leprosy meets Jesus in a city and asks to be healed. Jesus touches him, the leprosy disappears, and Jesus tells the man to show himself to the priests. Luke has already affirmed Jesus can heal (Luke 4:40). By touching and healing the man, Jesus makes him ceremonially clean: able to enter Jerusalem and worship at the temple, his sacrifices once again acceptable to God (Luke 5:12–16).

In the story of the paralytic, Jesus rewards faith with forgiveness.

Lesson in Depth

I. Friendship Finds a Way (Luke 5:17-20)

Jesus has already proved He can expel demons, heal ailments, and reveal the kingdom of God (Luke 4:31–44). In this chapter, He begins to separate His followers from His detractors. Chapter 5 begins with calling the first five disciples and emphasizing faith and repentance over religious tradition. In verses 12 through 16 Jesus heals a man with leprosy. This causes the news about Jesus to spread, and crowds came to hear him and be healed.

As He was teaching, that there were Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting by: In Capernaum (Mark 2:1) Jesus continued His teaching work and in His audience were religious and spiritual leaders (Pharisees and teachers of the law). Some of them had come from considerable distances (Judea, and Jerusalem).

The **Pharisees** were devoted and zealous, but for many of them religion was focused on an exact outward obedience to the law, and they believed that God only loved those that did as they did. Pharisees means *separated ones*. They separated themselves from everything they thought was unholy, and they thought everyone was separated from the love of God, except themselves.

These men were sitting by with critical eyes and hearts, ready to twist and pounce upon some word of Jesus. Yet at least they were *there*. “We are glad to have these people ‘sitting by’ rather than not coming at all. Being in the way, the Lord may meet with them. If you go where shots are flying, you may be wounded one of these days. Better to come and hear the gospel from a low motive than not to come at all.” (Spurgeon)

And the power of the Lord was present with Jesus to heal them: Whenever Jesus was present, the power of the Lord was present to heal. Yet even in the ministry of Jesus there seemed to be times of a greater demonstration and reception of God’s healing work. There were times when Jesus did not do many miraculous works because of the general unbelief of His audience (Matthew 13:58).

Some men came carrying a paralyzed man: These are very good friends who will bring this helpless man to Jesus to be healed. Palsy is a disease of the nervous system. Shaking of hands and legs is a symptom.

When they could not find a way: With the press of people around Jesus, it would have been impossible for men carrying a paralytic to get close enough to Him, even if they waited until He left the house. They went up on the housetop and let him down with his bed through the tiling into the midst before Jesus. Because of the crowded room, the friends of the paralyzed man had to lower him down through the roof – certainly, an unusual interruption to a sermon.

Through the tiling: The roof was usually accessible by means of an outside stairway, and was made of thatch, dirt or tile set over beams. It could be taken apart, and the friends of the paralyzed man could lower their friend down to Jesus.

This proved the determination and faith of friends of the paralytic. They counted on Jesus healing their friend, because it sure would be a lot harder to bring him back up through the roof than lowering him down.

Spurgeon spoke of the quality of men who would bring a friend to Jesus in such a way: “They need be strong, for the burden is heavy; they need be resolute, for the work will try their faith; they need be prayerful, for otherwise they labor in vain; they must be believing, or they will be utterly useless.”

When He saw their faith: Jesus looked up at the four men struggling with crude ropes tied to each corner of the stretcher with a paralytic on it. He looked at them and saw their faith.

Their faith could be seen. Their bold, determined action to bring their friend to Jesus proved they had real faith. There is something lacking in faith if it can never be seen.

In this account, the emphasis is on the faith of the friends of the paralyzed man. We need to have faith for more than our own needs, but also have faith that Jesus can and will meet the needs of others whom we bring to Him.

Man, your sins are forgiven you: We can imagine how the friends on the roof felt. They went to a lot of trouble to see their friend healed of his paralysis, and now the teacher seemed to only be concerned with his spiritual problems.

Jesus knew what the man’s real need was, and what his greatest need was. What good was it if the man had two whole legs, and walked right into hell with them?

Jesus did not mean that the paralyzed man was especially sinful, or that his paralysis was directly caused by sin. Instead, He addressed the man’s greatest need, and the common root of all pain and suffering – man’s sinful condition.

In Matthew, Mark, and Luke this happening is told, this is a very important message then. Some illnesses are brought on by sin. Faith is a very important factor in getting healed and in getting forgiveness of sin, as well. NO man has the power to forgive sin. Jesus lets His Godhood show when He forgives this man's sins.

II. Friendship’s Reward (Luke 5:21-26)

Who is this who speaks blasphemies: “Blasphemies” – their assessment would have been correct if He were not God incarnate.

Who can forgive sins but God alone? The religious leaders used the right kind of logic. They correctly believed that only God could forgive sins, and they were even correct for examining this new teacher. Their error was in refusing to see who Jesus actually was: God the Son, who has the authority to forgive sins.

“Again and again during the life of Christ the same dilemma was to re-appear. If he were not divine, then he was indeed a blasphemer; there could be no third way out.” (Cole)

The Pharisees make a true statement here, in that only God can forgive sin. Their error is in the fact that they do not recognize Jesus as God the Son (Messiah). They accuse Jesus unjustly of blasphemies. These scribes, Pharisees and lawyers are the educated people of their day. They know the letter of the law, but do not understand the things of the spirit.

This reminds us that only God can solve our sin problem. We can't even forgive ourselves because we don't have the power and authority to forgive ourselves. We must be persuaded that God has truly and rightly forgiven us in light of what Jesus did at the cross.

Perceived their thoughts: By means of His omniscience (Matthew 9:4; John 5:24-25). You see, Jesus didn't have to be told what they were saying, He understood their hearts. He knew the evil they were thinking, even before they said it. He looks into the intents of the heart. In other words, their hearts were planning evil.

Which is easier, to say: For men, both real forgiveness and the power to heal are impossible; but for God, both are easy. It is a logical assumption that if Jesus had the power to heal the man's disease, He also had the authority to forgive his sins.

In a way, it was “harder” to heal the man than to forgive his sins, because forgiveness is invisible – no one could verify at that moment the man was forgiven before God. Yet it could be instantly verified whether or not the man could walk. Jesus was willing to put Himself to the test in a way where the results would be immediate.

But that you may know that the Son of Man: Jesus often referred to Himself as **the Son of Man**. The idea was not of the “perfect man” or the “ideal man” or even the “common man.” Instead, it was a reference to Daniel 7:13-14, where the coming King of Glory, coming to judge the world, has the title *Son of Man*.

Jesus used this title often because in His day, it was a Messianic title free from political and nationalistic sentiment. Jesus could have more commonly referred to Himself as “King” or “Christ” but those titles, in the ears of His audience, sounded like “the One Who Will Defeat the Romans.”

Robertson says about this phrase, *Son of Man*: “Christ's favorite designation of himself, a claim to be the Messiah in terms that could not easily be attacked.”

Immediately he arose: Imagine the tension in this scene. The scribes were tense, because Jesus challenged them, and said He would demonstrate He was the Son of God. The paralyzed man was tense because he wondered if Jesus really would heal him. The crowd was tense because they sensed the tension of everyone else. The owner of the house was tense because he wondered how much it would cost to repair his roof. And the four friends were tense, because they were tired by now. The only one *not* tense was Jesus, because He had perfect peace when He said, “**arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.**” At those words, **immediately he arose.** Jesus’ *power* to heal and *authority* to forgive sins was **immediately** vindicated.

Imagine if Jesus *had failed*. His ministry would be shattered. The crowd would slowly make their way out of the house. The scribes would smile and say, “He can’t heal *or* forgive.” The four men would struggle to pull up the paralyzed man who looked more dejected and embarrassed than ever. The homeowner would look at his roof and think it was all for nothing.

But Jesus did not fail and could not fail, because all He needed to heal this man was *His word*. There is wonderful healing power in the word of Jesus, in the promises of Jesus, for those who *come to Him in faith*. This man came to Jesus in faith, even if it was on the borrowed faith of his friends.

They were all amazed, and they glorified God and were filled with fear: Jesus carried the day, and the people were *amazed* to see the power of God in action.

Lesson Summary

Overall, this passage teaches us about the power of faith, the authority of Jesus, the importance of compassion and empathy, the value of persistence, and the strength of community and support. Specifically, this is how these applications can be gleaned from this week’s lesson:

- **Faith and Healing:** The passage highlights the importance of faith in healing. The paralyzed man's friends demonstrated great faith by going to great lengths to bring him to Jesus, believing that Jesus could heal him. This emphasizes the power of faith in overcoming obstacles and receiving healing.
- **Authority of Jesus:** Jesus demonstrates his authority not only in healing the man but also in forgiving his sins. This shows that Jesus has the authority to forgive sins, which was controversial at the time and demonstrated his divinity.
- **Compassion and Empathy:** Jesus shows compassion and empathy towards the paralyzed man, recognizing his suffering and responding with healing. This teaches us the importance of showing compassion and empathy towards others, especially those who are suffering.
- **Persistence:** The story also highlights the importance of persistence in seeking help and healing. The friends of the paralyzed man did not give up when faced with obstacles but were determined to bring him to Jesus. This teaches us the value of persistence in pursuing our goals and seeking help when needed.
- **Community and Support:** The paralyzed man was brought to Jesus by his friends, highlighting the importance of community and support in times of need. This teaches us the value of community and how we can support each other in times of difficulty.