



THE GOSPEL OF
Luke

SESSION OBJECTIVE: LUKE 5:12-26

To understand the divine power of Jesus Christ.

No Social Distancing

Of the many debates that set the internet on fire over the last few years, one of them was a question of how Jesus would have handled all of the demands of the pandemic, which were not limited to masks, shots, and all of the social distancing requirements. One of my favorite interactions I saw on the internet was well-meaning individual attempting (with great gusto) to make the case that Jesus would “love His neighbor well” by social distancing in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19, to which another individual responded with: “Bro, He literally touched lepers.”

In Luke 5:12-26, Jesus demonstrates command over a number of things, one of which is the disease of leprosy. The Lord certainly didn’t heal every leper in His time, but He did heal some of them. What is even more important than the healings are the things He said in the midst of the healings that identify Him as more than a mere “good teacher.” Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, the only-begotten Son of God, “very God of very God,”¹ has the authority to not only cast out demons, but to heal disease, to heal paralysis, and more importantly than anything, *to forgive sin*.

¹ This is a Christological descriptor from the Nicene Creed.

The Leper

Verse 12 begins with Jesus encountering a leper, who upon seeing Jesus, “fell on his face and begged Him, ‘Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.’” Given the Old Testament warnings on how to deal with skin disease and the significant treatment of it in the Mishna, it is not hard to believe that leprosy was a common malady in the ancient near-East. Below are a few Old Testament passages that deal with it.

TREATING LEPROSY

The seminal text on the issue is Leviticus 13:9-17. The Levites were trained to determine the depth of infection by observing how progressive the skin disease had become. Much of Leviticus deals with the concept of wholeness, and thus if the leprosy was only partially covering the body, the person was deemed unclean (Lev. 13:9-11). However, if it had progressed further and covered “all his body,” the individual would be considered clean (Lev. 13:17). The way the ancient world treated leprosy was to isolate them into their colonies where they essentially were left to die. The prospect of being fully covered was not high, and thus the disease was punishing both in terms of physical and emotional wellness.

THE CAUSE OF LEPROSY

Given the lack of medical advancements in biblical times, there was not a clear idea on how someone contracted leprosy. However, there were at least a couple of recorded instances in which leprosy seemed to be a curse from God because of sin (Num. 12:10-13; 2 Kgs. 5:1-14), and thus the ancient world often connected leprosy to unconfessed immorality. This only furthered the propensity to not only physically distance oneself from a leper, but relationally as well in the form of almost something like shunning.

That Jesus was willing to even interact with this individual is remarkable. Not only was He unflinching towards the prospect of getting sick, He did not observe the social cues to avoid lepers. This set Him in a category of His own (like many of His actions did). The leper pleaded to be healed, and rightly recognized that Jesus had the ability to heal with simply a word. However, Jesus touched him anyway and healed him instantly (Lk. 5:13). He then commanded the leper to not tell anyone, but instead to observe the commandments of Leviticus 14 wherein a person was pronounced clean by a priest and thus restored to community. Despite the command to be silent, “even more the report about Him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear Him and to be healed of their infirmities” (Lk. 5:15).

The Paralyzed Man

The bulk of this passage involves not a leper but a man who is paralyzed. Jesus had been teaching, and for the first time in the audience Luke points out that the “Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem” (Lk. 5:17). This marks a ramping up in intensity in the teaching ministry of Jesus in that He is no longer only garnering the attention of regular people, but religious experts as well. The scene becomes even more extraordinary when some men bring their paralyzed friend on a bed to see if Jesus will heal him. Because of how crowded the room apparently was, the only way they could get him to Jesus was by going up on the roof and “letting him down with his bed through the tiles into the midst before Jesus” (Lk. 5:19).

This obviously would have been quite the feat, and Jesus recognized this, however His response earned some attention of its own: “Man, your sins are forgiven” (Lk. 5:20). The religious leaders immediately called it blasphemy, and rightly recognized that only God can forgive sin (Lk. 5:21), but apparently they didn’t verbalize it; these were their thoughts. Verse 22 clarifies this: “When Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answered them,

‘Why do you question in your hearts?’” Then, in a way of reasoning, Jesus asks the question: “Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Rise and walk?’ But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins’ - he said to the man who was paralyzed - ‘I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go home’” (Lk. 5:23-24). It’s an interesting argument because certainly of the two, forgiving sins is the more challenging endeavor; as the Pharisees reasoned, only God can forgive sins (Is. 43:25; 1 Jn. 1:9). However, it would be much easier to say it because there is no tangible physical evidence that it’s actually happened. So Jesus decides to demonstrate His divine authority by doing what no mere human could do as well; he heals the paralytic. This demonstrates that Jesus actually has the authority to do *both*; He can heal *and* forgive sin.

The response from the crowds, religious leaders included presumably, is overwhelming: “And immediately he rose up before them and picked up what he had been lying on and went home, glorifying God. And amazement seized them all, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, “We have seen extraordinary things today” (Lk. 5:25-26).

What About Now?

One obvious takeaway is that Jesus’ demonstration of power over things that men have no control over makes a strong case for His divinity. There are myriads of texts that confirm His deity; this is only one of them. Another takeaway is that since Jesus is God, He has the authority to forgive sin since sin is a transgression of God’s law. It isn’t that Jesus can convince God to forgive sin, but that Jesus is God and can decide to forgive of His own volition.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Luke 5:12. Which city was Jesus in? Who approached Him? Why would this have been culturally taboo? What did he say to Jesus?

2. Read Luke 5:13. How did Jesus respond to the leper? What did He say to him? What was the result?

Day Two

1. Read Luke 5:14-16. What two things did Jesus charge him to do? What Old Testament passage did this fulfill? Was the man silent like Jesus told him to be? What happened as a result of the spreading news about Jesus? Where would Jesus go to pray?

2. Read Luke 5:17. One of the days when Jesus was teaching, who else came to witness His power?

Day Three

1. Read Luke 5:18-20. Who came to Jesus, and who did they bring to Him? How did they bring their friend to Jesus? What did they have to do? What did Jesus say to the man when He saw their faith?
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2. Read Luke 5:21. What did the Pharisees and scribes begin to think when they heard Jesus forgive sin?
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Day Four

1. Read Luke 5:22-24. What did Jesus say to them, and why did He say that to them? In your own words, describe the events of this passage.
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2. Read Luke 5:25-26. In your own words, describe the outcome of this miraculous healing.
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Week 17 Discussion: Forgiveness

In Luke 5:12-26, Jesus demonstrates power over not only leprosy and paralysis, but sin itself. This provides the backdrop for Paul's words in Ephesians 4:32, "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you." That Jesus has forgiven us for our transgressions against God's law provides the impetus for us to forgive others when they transgress against us. Talk as a group about the difficulty but also freedom found in forgiving people who have harmed you.

1. Icebreaker: Is forgiving people who have wronged you hard? Why or why not?
2. Though Christ has forgiven you if you've been born again, how hard is it for you to forgive yourself when you sin?
3. Is the forgiveness of God something you can lose? Why or why not?
4. Read 1 John 1:8-9. What is the correlation between owning and confessing sin and being forgiven of it?
5. Who do you need to forgive right now?
6. How can the church encourage the practice of forgiveness more regularly?

Takeaways:

1. Jesus healed leprosy, paralysis, and even sin.
2. The religious leaders and crowds were amazed at His divine power.