

# Luke 5:17-26

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*Jesus publicly and dramatically heals a paralytic. Before Jesus heals this man, He tells him that his sins are forgiven, which causes some of the scribes and Pharisees in the crowd to silently accuse Jesus of blasphemy in their hearts. Jesus calls out their blasphemous unbelief and demonstrates that He is Who He claims to be by healing the paralytic, telling him to get up and go home. Accordingly, the crowds are amazed and begin glorifying God.*

The parallel Gospel accounts for this event are Matthew 9:2-8 and Mark 2:1-12.

Luke continues telling of *Jesus's* earthly ministry after a short interlude to describe how *He* would retreat into the wilderness to pray. Luke signals his return to the telling of *Jesus's* ministry and *teaching* with the phrase *One day*. Mark's Gospel account indicates that *Jesus* was in Capernaum, His home base for ministry in Galilee (Mark 2:1) for this miraculous encounter:

*One day He was teaching; and there were some Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting there, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem; and the power of the Lord was present for Him to perform healing (v 17).*

Luke highlights that *there were some Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting there, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem*. We learn later on in the passage that the phrase *teachers of the law* refers to *the scribes* (v 21). It also appears that by now the news of *Jesus's* miracles and teachings had travelled well beyond the cities of the region of Galilee (Luke 5:15). *Pharisees* and *scribes* had come from as far as *Jerusalem* in the south to hear *Him* speak. This would have been close to 110 miles of travel one way if they were to avoid Samaria and go by way of Jericho . ([See Map](#))

This is the first account in Luke (and Matthew and Mark) where *Jesus* is confronted by any of the religious authorities of Israel. This event comes immediately after Luke's telling of *Jesus's* healing of the man covered with leprosy (Luke 5:12-15) where *He* told the healed man to "go show himself to the priest" (Luke 5:12). It seems the man obeyed this and now the religious community had *Jesus* firmly on their radar. Perhaps the reason they were present at this occasion was because they had come to investigate the miracle worker for themselves.

The particular religious authority that confronted *Jesus* were *some Pharisees*.

*The Pharisees* were the keepers of Jewish culture and law. *The Pharisees* were viewed by the people as heroes for *their* moral rigor and righteousness. They were political descendants of the Maccabees, who had defended Judaism from extinction by its Greek rulers. *The Pharisees* followed a strict moral code and used *their* influence to place heavy moral burdens on people in order to control and exploit them for *their* advantage. *Some Pharisees*, but not all, were also considered scribes.

*The scribes* were experts in the Mosaic Law and oral Mishnah. *The scribes* were essentially religious lawyers. The Law of Moses are the first five books of the Old Testament (Genesis-Deuteronomy). The Mishnah was the oral tradition said to have been passed down from Moses to Joshua and subsequent generations of teachers. The Mishnah was largely an interpretation of the law. Its influence expanded with the rise of *the Pharisees* during the Babylonian exile.

The Mishnah was an oral tradition during the time of *Jesus* (it was redacted and written down around 200 A.D.). But during *Jesus*'s day, the Mishnah was only heard and not read. This is why *He* often said phrases like: "you have heard that it was said..." (Matthew 5:27, 38, 43). In *Jesus*'s day, to bolster their authority/legitimacy, rabbis would often ground their teaching in what influential rabbis of the past had said, what had been passed down in the Mishnah. Rabbis did this because (in their opinion) it gave their own teachings more authority and weight.

As *Jesus* was teaching that day in Capernaum, Luke points out that *the power of the Lord* was present for Him to perform healing. Luke used a similar phrase in Luke 4:1 when he described how *Jesus* began His earthly ministry: "And Jesus returned to Galilee in **the power of the Spirit.**"

All of *Jesus*'s miracles were done in *the power of* God the Father and the Holy Spirit because *Jesus* said: "I can do nothing on my own initiative" (John 5:30—see also John 8:28). The reason Luke does not acknowledge the Holy Spirit's role every time is likely because it would have been superfluous and redundant for him to do so.

Therefore, the fact that Luke mentions *the power of the Lord* here at this miracle seems to have special significance. Luke is likely setting the scene to emphasize how *the scribes* and *Pharisees* are present to witness the divine nature of *Jesus*. Luke is preparing his audience for what is about to occur so that they will know the source of *Jesus*'s power and *authority* which the religious leaders refuse to see.

The statement—*the power of the Lord* was present for Him to perform healing—is notably absent from both Matthew and Mark's parallel gospel accounts. Luke seems to be re-emphasizing to his Greek Gentile audience that this man *Jesus* was one with *God*. *Jesus* was able to perform these healings as a physical man because *He* was perfectly united with *God*'s Holy Spirit, the third person in the Trinity. It would strengthen the Gentiles' understanding of what it means to live the best life possible and to see the fulfillment of that idea in *Jesus* (1 Corinthians 1:22b). The ideal life and man is a life lived in *the Lord*'s power and strength and a man who is in perfect harmony with God and His will. Luke is presenting *Jesus* as this ideal Man to his Greek audience.

Something interrupts *Jesus*'s teaching: *And some men were carrying on a bed a man who was paralyzed; and they were trying to bring him in and to set him down in front of Him. But not finding any way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down through the tiles with his stretcher, into the middle of the crowd, in front of Jesus* (v 18-19).

Luke zooms in from speaking of the large crowds that were gathering around *Jesus* (Luke 5:15) to describe a small group of *men*. These *men* were carrying on a bed a man who was paralyzed.

Just as Luke emphasized the humanity of the “man covered with leprosy” (Luke 5:12) in the previous passage, instead of focusing on his social label—“leper” like Matthew and Mark did (Matthew 8:2; Mark 1:40) he underscores the humanity of the *man who was paralyzed* in this passage. Matthew and Mark again focus on the social label and refer to the man who was paralyzed as “the paralytic” (Matthew 9:2), “a paralytic” (Mark 2:3). Again, Luke’s medical phrasing acknowledges the physical condition which afflicts the *man—he was paralyzed*.

*They were trying to bring him to Jesus for healing because the man who was paralyzed was unable to move. Because of the crowd gathered around Jesus, they went up on the roof and lowered the man who was paralyzed through the tiles with his stretcher, into the middle of the crowd, in front of Jesus.* These men assessed the situation and realized that *they* were not going to be able to push through *the crowd* with a *stretcher* in order to get to *Jesus*. Instead of waiting for *Jesus* to come out or even turning around and giving up, *they* improvised a way to place *their* friend at His feet.

*Seeing their faith, He said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven you” (v 20).*

Luke tells us that *Jesus* saw *their faith*. It is not entirely clear in this context who *their* includes. At a minimum it seems *their* refers to *the men* who brought the *paralyzed man* lying on a bed to *Him*, but it could include the paralytic that *they* brought as well. The *faith* that *Jesus* saw was *their* act of love and expression of hopeful belief.

*Their faith* was simple and remarkable. *Their faith* simple, in that *they* believed *Jesus* had the power to heal *their* friend. And *their faith* was remarkable, in that it required a degree of thoughtfulness, much effort, and ingenuity to place *him* on a bed and carry *him* to *Jesus*. *They* even had to cut a hole in *the roof* to get to *Jesus* because *the crowd* surrounding *Him* prevented them from coming near. *Their faith* demonstrated both belief and love and putting those things into good action.

*Jesus* addresses the *man who was paralyzed* with a surprising and startling remark, *Friend, your sins are forgiven you*. This is surprising because the *man who was paralyzed* was brought to *Jesus* to be healed of his paralysis, not for *Jesus* to forgive his *sins*. The remark was also startling because the only people who could forgive a wrong would be someone injured by the *paralyzed man* and *God* Himself. The context strongly indicates that this was the first encounter between *Jesus* and this *man who was paralyzed*. In that case, there would have been no opportunity for the *paralyzed man* to have wronged *Jesus* and need forgiveness. By telling the *paralyzed man* that his *sins* were forgiven, *Jesus* is acting as though *He* is the chief party who has been offended by the *paralyzed man’s sins*. In other words, by making this statement, *Jesus* is speaking as though *He* is *God*.

*The scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, “Who is this man who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?” (v 21).*

This disturbed some of *the scribes and Pharisees* who were present and offended by *Jesus’s* remark. *They* thought to themselves, *who is this man who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone? They* rightly understood Who *Jesus* was presuming to be. When *Jesus* told

the man who was paralyzed that his sins were forgiven, these religious leaders correctly perceived that *Jesus* was acting as though *He* were *God*. But at least some of these *scribes and Pharisees* did not believe that *Jesus* actually was *God*. The irony is that *their* evil thoughts accusing *Jesus* of blasphemy were themselves acts of blasphemy.

This is the first time in Luke's narrative that *Jesus* directly confronts the religious leaders. Though it is the first time, it will not be the last. Throughout this chapter, Luke introduces the established religious authorities as the primary earthly opponents of *Jesus*'s kingdom message. It is not all *the scribes and Pharisees* that react this way to *Him*, but *some*. There will be leaders who believe in *Jesus* along the way, including Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea (John 3:1-2; Luke 23:50-51).

*But Jesus, aware of their reasonings, answered and said to them, "Why are you reasoning in your hearts?"* (v 22).

Even though some of *the scribes and Pharisees* did not believe that *Jesus* was *God*, they were wrong. *Jesus* was and is *God*. *Jesus* knew *their* thoughts. *He* understood the evil within *their* hearts that was driving *their* unbelief. *He* calls out the evil of *their* hearts' unbelief. His question to the unbelieving *scribes and Pharisees* is: *Why are you reasoning in your hearts?* The word Luke uses for "reasoning" is the Greek word διαλογισμός (G1261—pronounced "dee-al-og-is-mos") from which we get our term "dialogue." In His rhetorical remark, *Jesus* is accusing *their* hearts of silently running an inner dialogue thinking evil about *Him*. *Their* evil thinking might have been something like this: "If *Jesus* is saying this, then *He* is claiming to be *God*, and *He* cannot be *God* because *He* does not fit our preconceived notions of *God*, therefore *He* is blaspheming."

*Jesus* followed up this charge with another question, "*Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins have been forgiven you,' or to say, 'Get up and walk?'*" (v 23).

*They* likely dared not answer *Him* out loud. From an earthly point of view, it is much *easier to say* to someone *Your sins are forgiven you* than it is to tell a *man who was paralyzed to Get up and walk*. No one can measure whether forgiveness has occurred. You could claim it, and no one could prove whether or not it has happened. It is therefore *easier to say* and claim that forgiveness has occurred.

On the other hand, if someone says to a *paralyzed man—Get up and walk—*everyone will see rather quickly if healing has taken place, based on whether or not the *paralyzed man* can then *walk*. If the *paralyzed man* is healed, it proves that the person who told *him* to *Get up and walk* had the power and *authority* to do so.

*"But, so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,"—He said to the paralytic—"I say to you, get up, and pick up your stretcher and go home." Immediately he got up before them, and picked up what he had been lying on, and went home glorifying God* (v 24-25).

*Jesus* makes clear that the healing of *the paralytic* is intended as a testimony to *the scribes and Pharisees* that *He* does indeed have the *authority on earth to forgive sins*. *Jesus* then turns to the *paralyzed man* and says, *Get up, and pick up your stretcher and go home*. *Jesus* offered them conclusive evidence of His power. *Jesus* made clear that seeing these works created a higher responsibility to believe (Matthew 11:21-23).

Christ demonstrates that *He* has the *authority to forgive sins*, that *He* is *the Son of Man* (a common term meaning both “someone” as well as a biblical term for “the Messiah”), and that *He* is in fact *God*. *Jesus* demonstrates all of this by healing the *paralyzed man* so that he can *walk home* with his stretcher, or “bed” (Matthew 9:6).

Luke then succinctly tells us that *the paralytic* who was brought by his friends lying on a bed then *immediately got up and went home glorifying God*. This episode should have altered the evil thinking of *the scribes and Pharisees*. Their thinking or reasoning should have changed to something like, “Well this is clearly *God’s power* at work, so our preconceived notions must be wrong.” That appears to be the reaction of the crowds. The crowds perceived what the Pharisees and scribes did not—the crowds perceived *the power of the Lord* which Luke described at the beginning of this passage,

*They were all struck with astonishment and began glorifying God; and they were filled with fear, saying, “We have seen remarkable things today.”* (v 26).

When *all* the crowds of onlookers saw this take place, Luke relates that *they were* awestruck and even *filled with fear*. The *fear* of the Lord is a prevalent idea in Scripture. In Proverbs 1 and Psalm 111, it is described as “the beginning of wisdom.” In Proverbs 14, it is described as “a fountain of life” (for more examples, see Deuteronomy 10:12, Ecclesiastes 12:13, Luke 1:50). The word *fear* in these contexts certainly means to have a healthy concern. The word also carries the connotation of reverence, of awe. When we *fear* something, we acknowledge its superior *power*. *The crowd* clearly saw how *the power of the Lord was present* in *Jesus* through the miracle *they* had witnessed, even if the religious leaders did not see this. All the crowds also saw how *Jesus* had confronted the religious authorities.

There is little doubt that *they were* amazed at the miracle that healed the *man who was paralyzed*, but *their astonishment* was likely over more than just this miracle. *They* were probably amazed at the confrontation between *Jesus* and the unbelieving religious leaders. *The scribes and Pharisees* were established authorities who thought *Jesus* was a blasphemer. *Jesus* revealed the healing power of *God*, as well as the power *to forgive sins*. *He* scored an undeniable victory, while *the scribes and Pharisees* suffered humiliating defeat.

But *all* the crowds were also amazed at *God*. Having seen *the Lord’s power* in the good works of *Jesus* and the *faith* of the *paralyzed man’s* friends, *they* glorified *God*, the Father in heaven. And *they* marveled at the fact that *God* “had given such authority to men” (Matthew 9:8). *All* may not have understood that *Jesus* was claiming to be *God*, as some of the religious leaders did, but *they* recognized and acknowledged what was obvious, that *God* was miraculously working through *Him* and had given this Man *power* and *authority* to heal incurable afflictions—and *to forgive sins*.

## **Biblical Text**

<sup>17</sup> One day He was teaching; and there were some Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting there, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem; and the power of the Lord was present for Him to perform healing. <sup>18</sup> And some men were carrying on a bed a man who was paralyzed; and they were trying to bring him in and to set him down in front of Him. <sup>19</sup> But not finding any way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down through the tiles with his stretcher, into the middle of the crowd, in front of Jesus. <sup>20</sup> Seeing their faith, He said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven you.” <sup>21</sup> The scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, “Who is this man who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?” <sup>22</sup> But Jesus, aware of their reasonings, answered and said to them, “Why are you reasoning in your hearts? <sup>23</sup> Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins have been forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk’? <sup>24</sup> But, so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,”—He said to the paralytic—“I say to you, get up, and pick up your stretcher and go home.” <sup>25</sup> Immediately he got up before them, and picked up what he had been lying on, and went home glorifying God. <sup>26</sup> They were all struck with astonishment and began glorifying God; and they were filled with fear, saying, “We have seen remarkable things today.”