

YOUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN LUKE 5:17-26

Picture the scene: it is your front room and you have invited all your friends to hear this new preacher; he's been travelling around a bit and has built up something of a reputation; He's back home for a few days so you have invited Him and you invite your friends to hear Him. Some others have turned up; they are curious to hear Him because they've heard about Him and ask you if they can come in and of course you let them in! Then another group arrive who look a bit cross with life; they don't talk much and have just appeared at the door and asked if they could come and listen; you can tell by the way they're dressed that they're religious people. Everything's going well; the house is full; you have a great audience for the new young teacher and He's getting into His stride now; He's saying some challenging things and making people think; He's telling some stories and they seem nice, but they've all got a twist at end. It is just as you had hoped it would be.

Then, you feel some dust landing on your head. It's not that unusual. What's going on? Are there mice in the roof? The roof is only made of branches spread across the beams and then there's a layer of mud on top; it's rolled and dried and sometimes there are bits fall off, but surely not today! Not when you have so many visitors; that would just be embarrassing; like inviting the neighbours round in winter and the central heating fails! There is more dust and then some big bits fall down and that last one hurt; it came pretty near the teacher too; you wouldn't want Him to get hurt; that would turn today into a nightmare! It just carries on coming down. At this rate, you'll have to put a new flat roof on your house; soon there will be nothing left.

Then you actually look up! There's a hole in the roof and it is getting bigger. Then hands appear at the hole and the hands are actually making the hole bigger on purpose, deliberately. There are people up there, unroofing your roof! Next, some faces appear at the hole. They have made it big enough now for 4 faces to be seen and they've got someone else up there with them. They begin to move to pick up their friend who's lying on a stretcher; it is really just a mat with 2 poles through it and they've started to lower him down into room. What an embarrassment! They might have come in through the door; but then the door's pretty blocked up with people, sitting and standing! They are lowering their friend down into the room in front of the teacher. The man is obviously ill and in some distress. What will Jesus do?

In setting the scene for his version of this story Luke introduces us to some people who will reappear time and again through Jesus' ministry. He tells us that "*Pharisees ...*" (5:17) We said on the blue handout that this group (& there were about 6000 of them) was made up of legal experts and teachers who thought that Israel could only be purified through a more intense observance of the Old Testament law and had developed their own pattern of rules and traditions to accompany this and to achieve the kingdom. They were certainly full of zeal for the kingdom of God and saw that this was the way to establish God's rule and reign on earth – more law. So when Jesus came along preaching about the kingdom, but in different way, they wanted to check

him out. Luke tells us that these people had come from all over Israel to be there that day, from North and South, East and West, to hear Jesus and of all days He is interrupted by the roof caving in! What would they make of it all?

“Some men...” (5:18f) These men had heard that Jesus could heal people; He already had a bit of a reputation for healing: in chapter 4 there is an episode where Jesus healed a man with an evil spirit; then Peter’s mother-in-law had been sick with fever and Jesus healed her too; there was a man with leprosy, an outcast, a man everyone else avoided in case they catch his disease and above all ‘don’t touch him!’ and of course Jesus broke all their conventions and touched the man and healed him of his leprosy and when he went to the priest to go through all the rituals he was already healed and the priest could declare him clean again. Jesus had done all of that already and His reputation went ahead of Him. He was able to heal because *“the power...” (5:17)* God’s power was at work in Jesus in quite a incredible, amazing, extraordinary and unique way; what Jesus did, no-one had done before on that scale and no-one has done since in the same way; the power of God together with compassion for the needs of sick and vulnerable people were at work in Jesus.

These men heard that Jesus could heal and they brought their friend. He had been ill for a long time and they believed that Jesus could do something for him. They came to Jesus because of their faith. It was persevering faith – they could have been put off by the crowd at the door, but no! They could have been put off by the roof, but no! They would stop at nothing till the need was met, till Jesus had answered their prayers. Jesus was impressed by their faith and their faith found its reward. It was their faith that opened up the way for Jesus to bless these men and their friend in particular by giving them what their hearts’ desired.

Then the unexpected happened: Jesus said something that nobody predicted. *“Friend...” (5:20)* Pardon! That’s not why this man came! He came to be healed, but Jesus is forgiving His sins. The Pharisees: ‘Pardon! Wait a minute! Only God can forgive sins! We know for certain that you, young teacher, have no right to say what you have just said!’ *“Friend...” (5:20)* So Jesus says: *“Which is easier...” (5:23)* In some ways, it is easier to say ‘get up and walk’ because then He is not claiming to be God; in other ways it is easier to say ‘your sins are forgiven’ because nobody can prove it! You can say ‘your sins are forgiven’ but nobody can tell whether or not it is true. So in the end, Jesus says *“but that...” (5:24)* It’s as if healing the man was a way of demonstrating His authority to forgive. There was one answer to their question that the Pharisees had never considered, that Jesus was God in the world with power and authority to heal and forgive. The Man went home rejoicing and everyone else left astonished.

There are 2 ways in which this story touches us.

Jesus is able Luke draws a picture of Jesus and what does this picture say about Jesus? It says, very simply, Jesus is able to meet your needs. Jesus is able to meet the deepest needs of all the people who came to Him. The leper, an outcast; the paralysed man; the tax-collector, sinner – the 21st century

sophisticate who has life sorted on the outside, but deep down is unhappy and looking for the lasting reason to live; the family person who is busy running round occupying the children, but is trying to find answers to deep questions about life and its meaning; the person who is ill and the doctors can offer some kind of cure, but no medical person can offer peace to calm your fears, or reassurance of a deeper kind; the person who is living with a sense of guilt for all kinds of mistakes and faults and the shortcomings of life and that sense of guilt is eating away at their soul.

Jesus is able to meet all of these needs. Jesus has the power to do for us all that we need. He is able to bring peace to calm our fears; He is able to help us when we're weak and vulnerable; He is able to heal our spirits when we're broken inside and anxious; He is able to heal our bodies when they are broken; He is able to forgive our sins and guilt. This last one, forgiveness is heart of gospel; salvation is almost defined by Paul as 'forgiveness of sins'. All that stands against us, all our faults, mistakes and shortcomings, all the things that blot our copybook - all of these are wiped away by God because Jesus lived, died on a cross and was raised; this is the gospel, that Jesus says to us "*Friend...*" (5:20) That is for you and me; all that stands against us is gone, wiped away, forgotten by God, forgiven and we are set free! Jesus is able to do this for us and much more besides; this is the good news that Luke wants to tell the world.

Faith makes a difference There is a mood around that says 'Christian faith is irrelevant in the 21st century! Why bother with faith? It makes not a whit of difference to life whether you believe or not! We don't see the need.' Faith makes a huge difference; faith opens the door for us to find all this grace that Jesus is able to give to us and has to offer. Faith is the key to the power and grace of Jesus being at work in us. Faith is about believing Jesus is able to make a difference for us; faith is about trusting that Jesus will make a difference for us. Luke wrote his gospel so that his friend's faith would be strengthened by what he read of Jesus; Paul prays for Church at Ephesus (Ephesians 3:14-21) that their faith would be stronger so that they would learn endurance and patience in faith. Faith brings all the qualities of Jesus to touch our lives so that His power makes us strong, His grace forgives our sins, His love sustains us, His peace calms our fears, His power heals and mends our broken lives. All this is ours through faith!

The gospel is not about getting everything right. If it was, then our heroes would be the Pharisees; they thought God's kingdom was all about more rules and keeping them better. Jesus brought God's kingdom in different way; God came to rule in person; so Jesus is able to forgive sins. C S Lewis says this: "There comes a moment when the children who have been playing at burglars hush suddenly: was that a *real* footstep in the hall? There comes a moment when people who have been dabbling in religion ('Man's search for God'!) suddenly draw back. Supposing we really found Him. We never meant it to come to that! Worse still, supposing He had found us?" (Miracles p98) a real footstep in the hall? It's not the frightening or threatening footstep of the burglar, but the footstep of a Saviour and Friend! That's Jesus; He is able to do so much for us; faith opens the door for Him to make difference to our

lives. One man went home rejoicing having met Jesus; he was healed and forgiven. Will we go home rejoicing having met Jesus? He is able to save us completely; will He find faith in our hearts?