



Luke 5:17–21

17 One 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. And the power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal those who were ill. 18 Some men came carrying a paralysed 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. 20 When Jesus saw their faith, he said, 'Friend, your sins are forgiven.' 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?'

Reflection

In the ancient mindset there was a very close correlation between one's sin and one's lot in life. Perhaps a little like the Hindu concept of *karma* – what goes around, comes around, so to speak. In the ancient world, those who were rich and successful in life, strong in body and mind, were said

to be favoured in the sight of the gods for their obedient and upright lives. But those born with physical deformities, the sick, those in need, the orphans and widows, and those who lived in the margins of society were collectively looked down upon as ones steeped in sin who were receiving their just desserts for their errant lifestyle, or the wayward lifestyle of their parents. And so when Luke introduces Jesus in chapter 4 as one who has come to,

proclaim good news to the poor ... to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, Luke 4:18

– human sin is very much in the picture. And Luke follows his introduction to Jesus with him ministering to poor, the crippled,

the lame, the demon possessed, lepers, and the sick – all classes of people, in the ancient mindset, visibly suffering from the effects of their personal sin. Jesus came to save sinners, and so it can be no surprise that Luke places Jesus right amongst them, having compassion upon them and healing them, as he begins his biography of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Only Jesus did not come to simply treat the symptoms, he came to cure the disease. Luke begins to show us this more explicitly in today's passage.

Let me read it to you now from Luke 5:17–21,

17 One 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. And the power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal those who were ill. 18 Some men came carrying a paralysed 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. 20 When Jesus saw their faith, he said, 'Friend, your sins are forgiven.' 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?'

In case you missed it, Pharisees and teachers of the law have come from ‘every village of Galilee’ and from Judea and Jerusalem as well to witness the miracles that Jesus is performing and to hear and evaluate his teaching. The leading theological minds of Jesus’ day, professional theologians, some coming all the way from Jerusalem, the intellectual centre of Israel, have come out in force to investigate the phenomenon that is sweeping their faith. And Jesus, anointed by the Holy Spirit, does not disappoint. As verse 17 says,

And the power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal those who were ill.

Luke then turns to one occasion amongst the many. The room is packed, and it is a big room. Jesus is standing in the cen-

tre, captivating his audience with the wisdom and authority of his teaching. Even some of the religious leaders nod approving as he expounds the ancient text. And then dust and debris begins to fall from the ceiling. Everyone looks up as sunlight streams in through a widening hole and then dramatically, the body of a man, no, a cripple, is being lowered by ropes fastened to the four corners of a stretcher to rest right in front of Jesus. It would appear that the cripple's friends, frustrated in their attempt to bring the man in to Jesus' presence, in their desperation have been driven to this. They'd somehow managed to lift the paralysed man onto the roof, remove the tiles, and there he now lies in middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus.

The man's paralysed, utterly unable to

help himself, so his friends have brought him to Jesus. And of course, there's a sermon right there, which Justin will no doubt unpack for us tomorrow. But for today I'd like us to concentrate on the man's friends. Did you catch Jesus' reaction? Verse 20,

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

Not when 'Jesus saw the faith of the paralytic', but when 'he saw the faith of the paralytic's friends', he said to him, because of them,

'Friend, your sins are forgiven.'

They'd moved heaven and earth for their mate. In the ancient mindset their friend was impossibly trapped in his sins, and ut-

terly unable to save himself. And so they brought him to Jesus. They would stop at nothing to bring their friend into his presence, and because of their faith, Jesus reaches beneath their friend's besetting problem – his paralysis – to solve his greatest problem, his sin.

Was there a correlation between this man's physical condition and his sin? Maybe. The Bible tends to argue with itself when it comes to this issue. We see sinful rich and righteous poor, vice-versa, and everything in between, in the pages of Scripture. But ultimately, whether the blame lay directly at his feet or not, this man was suffering from sin's effects on our world. Yet his presenting problem, and mine and yours (whatever they may be), pales into insignificance when it comes to his greatest

need. Jesus Christ did not come to treat sin's symptoms but to bring an end to the disease. And so he says to him, because of them,

‘Friend, your sins are forgiven.’

And as you can imagine, Jesus' words set off a storm amongst the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, unspoken as yet, but it will all come out tomorrow, verse 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?’

Think & Pray

But for today, don't miss this man's friends. They've teamed up. Perhaps they've ganged up. And together they've carried their mate, willing or otherwise, into the presence of Jesus, who sees their faith and has mercy on him. Who is it that you are labouring hard for in prayer? Have you enlisted the help of your Christian friends? Is it time to do something extraordinary, something uncomfortable, something perhaps a bit rash, to cut through all of the noise so that the person you're praying for can encounter Jesus?

The love these men held for their mate overcame the most daunting of obstacles. They weren't put off by the crowd. Their love was the reason for his deliverance. This is how it is with God too, for God so loved the world that he made the ulti-

mate sacrifice for us. He dug, so to speak, through the roof of our world and lowered his Son down so Jesus could die for our sins. And the same holds true for these men, for whom nothing was too difficult to see their mate saved.¹

Pray today for your friends. What wouldn't you do to see them saved? Pray that Jesus would have mercy on them through your persistent prayers and the faith you display in doing everything in your power (and some more) to see them come into the presence of Jesus. Pray that God would impress on your heart today the urgency of their salvation and give you the grace you need to act on this feeling. May they be saved because of your faith.

¹ R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth* (Preaching the word; Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2015), 181

