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Forgives

Jesus has the power to forgive sin.

LUKE 5:17-26

Basketball players understand the power of a “triple threat” position. This is a stance from which players can shoot the ball, pass it, or drive to the basket. A player in the triple threat position puts extra pressure on the defense. It’s always good to bring multiple abilities to the table. A lot of people in Jesus’ day thought He was just a good preacher or a powerful miracle worker. While those are both true, they missed what He really had to offer. Jesus’ greatest gift was His authority to forgive sins.

What are the most common ways people describe Jesus? What do the common descriptions reveal about a person’s expectations of Jesus?

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

LUKE 5:12-26

Luke's stated objective was to assure his friend, Theophilus, that everything he had heard about Jesus was true (Luke 1:3-4). One way Luke did this was to recount examples of Jesus' authority and power. In chapter 4, he had shown Jesus' authority over Satan (4:1-13). Jesus also demonstrated authority through His preaching (4:16-30), His ability to exorcise demons (4:31-37), and His power over sickness (4:38-44).

In chapter 5, Luke focused on the men who would continue Jesus' mission after His death and resurrection (5:1-11, 27-32). These men left their comfort zones to follow Jesus. That submissive spirit opened the door for Jesus to teach them.

Between His call to the fishermen and His call to the tax collector, Jesus again demonstrated His power and authority. When some men carried a paralyzed man to Jesus for healing, He chose to honor the faith of the man and his friends by forgiving the man's sins. This claim of divine power did not sit well with the religious leaders, who accused Him of blasphemy. Jesus responded to their doubts and accusations with a question of His own. He asked the leaders if it was easier to forgive sins or to heal. The implication was that God was the source of both. To prove He was able to forgive the man's sins, Jesus healed his paralysis. The miracle of the healing provided a vivid illustration of Jesus' divinity and His right to forgive sins. It also revealed Jesus' mission. He had come to forgive sins, not just heal bodies.

The results left the crowd amazed. But His stand against the religious leaders created—or widened—the gap between Him and them. This was the first real conflict the Lord experienced with the spiritual elite, but it would not be the last. He would soon cross swords with them again over the topic of fasting (5:33-39). But all of these events foreshadowed His ultimate conflict with them, which led to His crucifixion and death.

Read Luke 5:17-26 in your Bible. What role did faith play in the healing of the man?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

HOPE DEMONSTRATED (LUKE 5:17-19)

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 the sick. ¹⁸ 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.

VERSE 17

Jesus often taught large crowds, but this verse indicates He also taught in people's homes. This event occurred during a ministry stop in His adopted hometown of Capernaum (Mark 2:1).

Among the audience on this day were *Pharisees and teachers of the law*. These leaders had come from all over, including the nation's religious center in *Jerusalem*. The implication is that at least some of them were on an "inspection tour" of sorts. Jesus' name and reputation had grown, perhaps they had come to make sure His teaching matched their definition of orthodoxy.

Luke also noted that *the power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal the sick*. The term *Lord* identifies God the Father, from whom Jesus drew His authority and power. Luke was probably preparing his readers for what was about to happen.

VERSES 18-19

As Jesus taught, *some men* came to the house carrying a *paralyzed* friend on a pallet of some sort. No details are given about the men or the nature of their friend's paralysis. But their actions demonstrated loyalty and commitment to do what was best for their sick friend.

The men's original plan was to bring their friend into Jesus' presence and *lay him before* His feet. Apparently, they knew about the healings Jesus had performed in other places and were convinced that He could—and would—do the same for their paralyzed friend.

The men ran into an obstacle. The house was so crowded that they couldn't get anywhere close to Jesus. In all likelihood, the house was small, so it would not take a large crowd to create a barrier. In his Gospel, Mark stated that people were filling the doorways (Mark 2:2), which means they may have been overflowing into the streets.

Readers should note that the religious leaders were part of the problem instead of part of the solution. Luke shared that these individuals were sitting in Jesus' presence as He taught, meaning that they were in the house and helped make up the crowd that was keeping a man in true need at bay. Instead of surrendering their place to one who needed help, they stayed put so they could critique Jesus more effectively.

Undeterred, the men refused to let the crowd ruin their plan. They found a different way to get their friend to Jesus. They took some of the roof apart and **lowered him on his mat through the tiles**. Ancient houses had flat roofs made of a thin layer of either mud mixed with straw (typically Jewish) or tile (typically Greek). The men would have had no problem gaining access and letting their friend down to Jesus.

**How did the men's actions demonstrate the power of hope?
How is the power of hope seen today?**

DID YOU KNOW?

A flat roof was a vital feature of first-century houses. It was used for daily chores such as washing, weaving, drying fruits and grains, cooking, enjoying the cool breezes in the heat of the day, or sleeping in the evening (2 Kings 4:8-11; Acts 10:9).

FORGIVENESS GRANTED (LUKE 5:20-24)

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?”²² Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, “Why are you thinking these things in your hearts?²³ Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk’?²⁴ But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” So he said to the paralyzed man, “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.”

VERSES 20-21

Hope goes hand-in-hand with faith. When Jesus looked at them, He didn’t just see a group of men trying to help a friend; He saw faith. Luke said that Jesus saw **their faith**. The plural pronoun *their* indicates that the Lord took into account the faith of everyone in this small band of brothers, not just the paralytic. While the one who needed healing certainly demonstrated faith—allowing himself to be lowered through a hole in the roof—Jesus also honored the faith of the others who would not let the crowds deter them.

It should be noted that faith was not just an internal dynamic—some kind of wish or vague belief. Instead, it was belief that ignited action. The men actively demonstrated their faith, first by coming to Jesus and then by digging a hole in the roof. While their works did not heal the man or produce salvation, their actions indicated faith that was strong enough for both.

But this was not just a healing faith; it was also a saving faith. Instead of immediately curing the man’s ailment, Jesus went deeper and declared his sins **forgiven**. This declaration rested solely on the authority of Jesus. He did not pray for God’s forgiveness on the man. He forgave sins in His own power, which adds significance to the rest of the story.

Granting healing is one thing; forgiving sins is something altogether different. It created a whole new controversy between Jesus and the religious leaders. His forgiveness raised questions in their hearts and minds. The religious leaders wondered, “Who does this guy think He is—going around acting like God and trying to forgive sins!”

The teachers and Pharisees accused Jesus of **blasphemy**. This term described a human’s attempt to usurp God’s authority. According to Jewish law, blasphemy was a capital offense. The leaders understood that only **God alone** forgives sins. Therefore, Jesus’ claim to forgive the paralytic’s sins was a claim of deity.

The teachers and Pharisees believed Jesus was trying to claim authority reserved only for the Father. Of course, that was exactly what He was claiming—but it was not blasphemy, because Jesus is equal to God. As He had told the residents of Nazareth, the Messiah was called to provide both spiritual and physical healing (4:18-21). Here, He was reaffirming His authority to do both.

Many in our culture believe the deity of Jesus is a relatively modern invention, not something He claimed for Himself. Jesus' words—and the leaders' reaction—clearly show that Jesus did claim to be equal with God.

How does Jesus' true identity come in conflict with people's preconceived ideas about Him?

KEY DOCTRINE: *God the Son*

Christ is the eternal Son of God (John 8:58).

VERSES 22-23

Jesus knew what they were thinking and responded to the leaders' muffled accusations. It is not clear if Jesus read their minds—which would be another indication of His deity—or if He simply discerned what they were thinking. Either way, He was not going to let their beliefs go unchallenged.

In response to their questions, He raised His own question. Would it be easier to tell a person, ***your sins are forgiven*** or to tell a person to ***get up and walk?*** The implied answer is that they are one and the same. Only God can forgive sins, and He is the only One who can heal. He may use others to lead people toward salvation or to perform the miracle, as He would do later with the disciples. But He is the power behind both.

BIBLE SKILL: *Use a Bible concordance.*

Use a Bible concordance to identify passages that contain the phrase “Son of Man.” Pay particular attention to Old Testament passages from Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. Review instances of Jesus using the term, looking at passages from the Gospel accounts. How does Jesus’ use of the term compare to how the term is used in the Old Testament? How does the term give us insight into Jesus’ humanity?

VERSE 24

Jesus didn’t give the teachers and Pharisees a chance to debate His question. Instead, He answered it directly—through actions rather than words. So that they would know that He—the **•Son of Man**—shared God’s **authority to forgive sins**, He told the paralyzed man to get up and walk home.

The term *Son of Man* was a favorite title that Jesus used for Himself. It carried Messianic implications, further demonstrating that He was fully aware of His identity as God the Son. His power to heal the paralytic with just a spoken word answered Jesus’ question and ended the argument before it even began.

For his part, the paralyzed man and his friends literally walked away doubly blessed. They had come hoping that Jesus would heal their friend’s infirmity. But they also saw Him do a much greater work—forgiveness. Sometimes, we think we know what we need. But Jesus understands what’s below the surface and He alone is able to fulfill our deepest needs.

How can a person’s perceived need open the door for God to do greater things?

PRAISE OFFERED (LUKE 5:25-26)

²⁵ Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. ²⁶ Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, “We have seen remarkable things today.”

VERSES 25-26

The paralyzed man acted on his faith. Once Jesus told him to get up and walk, that’s what he did. Luke used the word *immediately* to underscore Jesus’ power. The man was healed as soon as the words left Jesus’ lips. What’s more, His power to forgive sins was also validated in the moment. It also shows that the man had no doubts or questions; he simply obeyed.

The result of the inward work was an outward desire to praise God; he *took what he had been lying on and went home praising God*. As Luke demonstrated in other parts of his narrative, the natural response to God’s work is praise.

Jesus again showed that He was God’s Son and was worthy of worship and praise.

The paralytic was not the only one moved to glorify God that day. The crowd in the house was astounded by what it had seen, and the people *gave praise to God*. Luke noted that they were filled with awe, a holy reverence for God and His work. As the object of that awe, Jesus again showed that He was God’s Son and was worthy of worship and praise.

The term *today* could have meant the twenty-four-hour period in which the people were living. But it also could be Luke’s way of referring to the entire period of kingdom work carried out by Jesus. The crowd had certainly seen a lot in a short amount of time, but they were also witnesses to a larger work of God taking place through His Son.

The crowd recognized that they had seen incredible things. While the religious leaders undoubtedly resented Jesus’ words and actions, others in attendance were amazed. As we reflect on what Jesus has done for us, we should be moved to praise as well.

APPLY THE TEXT

- Jesus offers hope to those who seek Him.
- Jesus forgives all who come to Him in faith.
- Believers should praise God for His forgiveness of sin.

Who do you know that needs hope? What actions can you take to introduce them to Jesus and His hope?

Write about a time when Jesus did something amazing in your life or the life of someone close to you. How did that event affect your understanding of who He is?

Discuss how your Bible study group can actively promote praise and worship. How can you do a better job of offering glory to God during your times together?

PRAYER NEEDS
