



Luke 5:17-26

“Whole From The Inside Out”

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“Following Christ from City Center”

LUKE 5:17-26 "WHOLE FROM THE INSIDE OUT"

6 Exorcisms, 17 Healings, 8 Nature Miracles In Four Gospels

5:15-16 Report After Healing Of The Leper, Jesus Retreats For Prayer. Reacts To Success

15 But so much more the report went abroad concerning him, Process, Fulfills Program Of 4:16-30, 43-44
 and great multitudes gathered to hear (teaching) and to be healed of their infirmities. 2 Parts: *hear + heal*
 16 But he (i.e. Jesus) withdrew to the wilderness and prayed. Hear = Truth Encounter, Healing = Power Encounter
 9:28, 11:1, Jesus Isolates For Intimacy/ Filling + Guidance

Setting A. 5:17 INTRODUCTION TO SECTION IV, 5:17-6:19, POWER OF THE LORD.

17 *And it happened on one of those days, when he was teaching, hear + heal, Typical Day, Capernaum (Mk. 2:1)*
there were Pharisees and teachers of the law standing by, Lev. 19:2, Preparation For v.21
who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem; High-Brow Religious Team
 and the **POWER OF THE LORD WAS WITH HIM TO HEAL.** 1:35, 4:14, 18, 36; 6:19, 8:46, Acts 2:22, 10:38
 Not Magic/Sorcery But God's Charism
B. 5:18-6:5 FIRST CYCLE: HEALING, CALLING, CONTROVERSY // Mk. 2:1-12, Mt. 9:1-8.
 Sin Paralyzes; Jesus Frees!

1) 5:18-26 Two-Part Healing Of Paralyzed Man With An Inserted Controversy Story.

Healing 1 Jesus Is Found In Fellowship With Sinners

		a) vv.18-19 Problem: Paralyzed Man.	Mk. 2:1 Capernaum Omitted By Luke
18	1	And <i>behold</i> , men were bringing <i>on a bed</i> a man who was paralyzed,	Resourceful Friends With Faith!
	2	<i>and they sought to bring him and lay him before Jesus;</i>	Find Jesus In A House, v.19b
19	3	but finding no way to bring him in, because of the crowd,	Healing Part I: Forgiveness
	4	<i>they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the midst before Jesus.</i>	Tiles = Mediterranean Home Adaptation, Mk. 2:4
		b) v.20 Jesus Speaks To The Man: Forgiveness Of Sins/ Spiritual Healing. //7:48-49	Sin/Sickness Sometimes Related, 1:77, Mk. 2:5 My son
20		And when he saw their faith he said, Saw Actions + Motive, Jesus Sees Basic Need, Is. 33:24, Ps. 103:3 <i>"Man, your sins are forgiven for you!"</i>	p.v. = by God, <i>Forgive</i> (4x), Perfect Passive = Accomplished

Forgiveness = Blockages Removed, Healed Relationship With God!

c) v.21 Scribes And Pharisees Question Jesus Secretly. 1:4 Religious Schools

21 *And the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, saying, Lev. 24:10-23, 1 Kgs. 19:4, 6, 22*
"Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Unacceptable! Divine Prerogatives, Mk. has Why
 Ability? *Who can forgive sins but God only?" True Statement, Ironic, Jesus Does Act For God, 2 Sam. 12:13*
 Pharisees = Non-Priestly Separatist Movement, Serious On Law

c') vv.22-24a Jesus Questions Scribes And Pharisees Openly After Revelation.

22 *When Jesus perceived their questionings, he answered them, 7:39, Action Of Prophet, 2:35*
 Authority? *"Why do you question in your hearts? Lesser/Greater, Controversy Story*
 23 *Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'?*
 24 *But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins"- Agency, 6:5*

Healing 2 Is v. 24 Spoken To Audience?

		b') v.24b Jesus Speaks To The Man: Healing Of His Body/ Physical Healing.	God Works Through Approved Agent, <i>Son of man</i> Jesus Did Not Pray For Healing But Commanded 3 Commands → 3 Obedient Actions God Does Support A Fraud! He Goes Home A New Man!
1,2,3		he said to <i>the man who was</i> paralyzed- <i>"I say to you, rise, take up your bed, and go home."</i>	Picture Of Resurrection Liberation = Salvation Father Wills, Jesus Speaks, Spirit Acts Dt. 18:15-22, True Prophet
		a') vv.25-26 Solution: Paralyzed Man Healed.	Whole Person Effected, Healing Part II: Physical Visible (healing) Proves The Invisible (forgiveness) Fulfills 4:18, Spiritually Whole, Physically Restored
25	1a	And immediately he rose <i>before them/</i> ,	
	b	and took up that on which he lay/	
	c	and went <i>home, glorifying God./</i> 2:20, 4:15, 7:16, 13:13,	
26	2	And amazement <i>seized</i> them all, and they glorified God, <i>and were filled with awe, saying, "We have seen strange things today."</i> //4:21, Unexpected, Wonderful Things!	Both Give Glory To God

6:19 *And all the crowd sought to touch him, for POWER CAME FORTH FROM HIM AND HEALED THEM ALL.*

A Brief Treatment Of 5:17-26

Here we begin a new section (5:17-6:19) which is marked by the inclusion, “and the power of the Lord was with him to heal” (5:17) // “for power came forth from him and healed them all” (6:19). Healing, controversy, and discipleship materials are woven together in two parallel blocks (B. 5:18-6:5 // B’ 5:6-19). Jesus’ ministry of kingdom word and power begins to draw official attention which leads to a plot against him (6:11). He acts as God’s prophet, refers to himself in a title from Daniel 7:13 (*the son of Man*), announces forgiveness, and redefines the sabbath in a challenge to current practice. The call of Matthew (5:27-28) and the appointment of the twelve (6:12-19) demonstrate Jesus is *the friend of sinners* and that his life will be remembered and continue through his apprentices. The name for this is *church*.

Jesus’ typical actions are teaching and healing in the power of the Spirit (v.17). Professor Jesus is Dr. Jesus! To meet him is to receive truth about God and be immersed in holy, healing love that restores. The phrase, “and the power of the Lord was with him to heal,” is more than an explanation for miracles; it’s an assurance Jesus is not a magician or sorcerer (i.e. one who manipulates invisible powers through ritual and technique). His effects are from Israel’s God as demonstrated in his retreats for prayer (5:16). *Jesus, Lord, and Power* (of the Spirit) are noted in v.17. The new reality is experientially Trinitarian!

The story of the healing of the paralyzed man is a two-part healing (5:18-20, 24b-26) into which a controversy story (5:21-24a) is inserted. The surface structure is a 6:2 concentric pattern (a-b-c // c’-b’-a’) with dueling questions at the center as the prophet Jesus comes into conflict with the members of a lay renewal group centered on holiness - the Pharisees- who are offended Jesus claims to know the mind of God in an individual case and bypasses the temple ceremonies associated with the forgiveness.

And behold (v.18) signals a new story. Luke uses the literary equivalent of an aerial view. We see the man and his carriers at a distance (v.18a), see them frustrated by the crowd (v.18b), then observe them go up to the roof, tear off the tiles, and lower the man down (v.19). They succeed; he is now *before Jesus*. It is *their faith* (paralyzed man + loving friends) that Jesus sees (v.20). But his response is surprising. He does not deal first with the man’s physical condition but instead announces that whatever blockages exist between him and the Father are now removed as a gift, “Man, your sins *are* forgiven (passive voice = by God) *for you* (again, by God)! Jesus grants a restored relationship with the Father. How easy to be so impressed by physical limits that we miss the deeper level. Disabled people remain sinners who need a new relationship with God. Jesus sees the need beneath appearances in us all. We are all disabled.

The center of the scene is a controversy over who has authority to forgive. To claim divine prerogative is to infringe on God’s honor After announcing a verdict on one they will not name, “Who is this who speaks blasphemies?” a corrective is offered, “Who can forgive sins but God *only*.” The church smiles since we know Jesus is divinity at ground level. In response, Jesus calls attention to their discussion and poses a question, “Which is easier? Invisible forgiveness, or visible restoration?” Clearly the first, but if Jesus does the harder, the easier is also established. With a command in three parts (rise, take up, go home) the paralysis is removed. Note that Jesus does not pray for the sick but announces *a prayer of command* which the Spirit empowers. God’s care for the whole person is now visible. The kingdom in Jesus through the Spirit means a fresh relationship with God and the removal of impediments. The healing establishes Jesus authority to forgive. The man is now ecstatic in his praise, and the crowd joins in the wonder and testimony (vv.25-26). The authorities are not pleased! Trouble is ahead!

WHOLE FROM THE INSIDE OUT

“Man, your sins are forgiven for you (i.e. by God)”

Jesus sets a captive free

LUKE 5 : 2 0

As her father tucked her in one night, his little daughter asked, “What’s your favorite Bible story, Papa?”

There are so many,’ he said. The story of the men who carried their paralyzed friend to Jesus is a favorite; it reminds me how your Uncle Hans was healed.”

"I don't know that one. Tell it to me, Papa."

"Many years ago," he began, "Hans and Enid escaped the war in Europe to continue teaching in the seminary. Things were difficult because his English was not good, but soon he became one of our most beloved teachers. When he spoke the Scriptures came alive. Nearly every day Hans and Enid took long walks together, holding hands. It warmed our hearts to see them sitting close together in church.

"Then one day Enid died. For weeks Hans would not eat or take walks. The seminary president, along with three friends, often visited him, but he felt lonely and depressed. On one visit, Hans said to his friends, 'I am no longer able to pray. In fact, I am not certain I believe in God.'

"After a moment, the seminary president said, 'Then we will believe for you. The four men met daily. They made confession on behalf of Hans, asked God to restore the gift of faith to their friend and continued to visit him.

"Then, after many months, the four men gathered in Han's living room as before. But today he smiled, 'It is no longer necessary for you to pray *for* me. Today, I would like you to pray *with* me.' The dark night of the soul had passed."

There was a long silence before the little girl spoke. "Uncle Hans was just like the sick man in the story, wasn't he Papa? Only instead of a pallet to carry him to Jesus, his friends used prayer." The father nodded and kissed his daughter.¹

¹ Edited from "Carrying a Friend," in William R White, *Stories for the Journey* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1988), 47-49.

We are not self-sufficient. We need the faith and help of others; it's one way God binds us to the body of Christ. Self-sufficiency and individualism, especially in matters of faith, is an illusion.² I do not have much hope for those who desire the benefits of Christ- namely forgiveness and healing and heaven at death and ultimately a new world at the end- apart from the body of Christ which is his church. The independent and the isolated and the proud who scorn the church and its humble ministries will just have to face the storms of life on their own, and at the end answer a tough question when all their loyalties are up for review, "Were none of my churches good enough for you?"³

TURNING TO THE TEXT

The story before us is a cameo of Jesus' ministry of putting the truth and power of God's reign on display at ground level. It count six elements here:

- 1) Teaching the kingdom, "On one of those days, as he was *teaching*;"
- 2) Receiving insight from the Holy Spirit, "When Jesus *perceived* their questionings;"
- 3) Pronouncing forgiveness, "Man, your sins *are forgiven* for you;"
- 4) Mediating healing, "I say to you, *rise*, take your bed, and go home;"
- 5) Confronting well-meaning religious leaders who wanted to build walls around God's grace, "Why do you *question* in your hearts?";
- 6) Amazing the crowds, "And *amazement* seized them all," and bringing glory to God, "and they glorified God." Pretty impressive I'd say!

Jesus is not like the specialist who has the luxury of focusing on a part of the person. For ignorance, a teacher is the cure. For emotional pain, a therapist. For organic disease or injury, a physician. For a spiritual or moral issue, a pastor. We moderns love to carve people up, then vend out the pieces to specialists and sub-specialists and sub-sub-specialists. In a sense this is necessary; there's so much to

² For an analysis of the downside of radical individualism and the isolation it promotes, see Randy Frazee, *The Connecting Church 2.0* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), Chapter 3, "The Problem of Individualism," 35-46. For a distinctively Methodist presentation of corporate spiritual formation, see Ben Witherington III, *A Shared Life* (Nashville, TN: Abington, 2012).

³ The new little book by Tom Rainer, *I Am A Church Member* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing, 2013) causing quite a stir these days!

know, who can know it all? True enough, but not with Jesus. He sees us whole and deals with the total person. His is not a segmented salvation. He did not come to make us angels but fully and authentically human. “The glory of God,” wrote the second century theologian Irenaeus, “is man (and woman) fully alive.” In Jesus God comes personally to rescue and repair in us the divine image impressed into every person, and to do it all in community. There are persons whom God desires to touch but will not til they humble themselves and place themselves in the midst of some body of struggling saints. The church is an earthen vessel, a cracked clay pot, but we contain the treasures of God’s grace, and we will always be a mess because we deal with the whole person across the whole of life. I’m not sure *slick* is what we’re after.

This is what Jesus did for a paralyzed man who literally *dropped in* on him one day. Total make-over! *Forgave* his sin, *challenged* his obedience, *healed* his body, *defended* him against bad religious leadership, *sent him home* to rebuild a new life, and *put a song of praise on his lips*. That is human transformation this side of the kingdom! At least this much of the kingdom is available within history. Some of this wholeness we can have now, the rest at the resurrection of the dead. Appetizers now, full banquet later on. Glimpses now, full view later on.⁴ As a banner over this story we could place Psalm 103, verses 3 and 4, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who *forgives* all your iniquity, who *heals* all your diseases, who redeems your life from the Pit... so that your strength is renewed like the eagle’s.”

Think about what happened that day. Our nameless friend woke up guilty and went to bed forgiven. Woke up gnarled and went to bed stretched out straight. Woke up wondering if he was loved by God; went to bed assured from a divine touch. Woke up facing one future, went to bed with a new future.

But what about *life after the healing*? What challenges did he face the next morning? Getting a job, no more begging. He now had to take up family responsibilities, care for others instead of being taken care of. How about learning new social skills, having to incorporate a new theology into his life, working out

⁴ On the tension between the *already* and the *not yet* as regards the kingdom of God, see Derek Morphew, *breakthrough* (Pretoria, SA: Vineyard Publishing International, 1991), Part II, “The New Testament Revelation of the Kingdom,” 47-106; Alexander Venter, *doing healing* (Pretoria, SA: Vineyard Publishing International, 2009), Chapter 4, “Understanding the kingdom of God,” 66-82; Christopher Morgan, Robert Peterson, *The Kingdom of God* (Wheaton, ILL: Crossway, 2012), 42-46, 186-187.

when it meant to have a testimony about Jesus? How did he do all that? How do you quit thinking and acting like a cripple or a drunk or a loser if it's all you know? Jesus gave him a new relationship with God and a new relationship with himself, but what about the old software still running in his head? Were there days when it crossed his mind, "In some way the old life was easier." There is grace and growth *after the miracle*. One day our friend will tell us just how much trouble getting healed by Jesus caused. With minor variations, this story is found in Matthew, Mark and Luke.⁵ It was an early Christian favorite because it touches so many issues. On occasion Jesus asked, "Do you want to be healed?" It was not a trick question.⁶ Some folk, apparently, would rather stay sick; after all, if you get healed, you might lose your disability check and not have as much free time to waste while others work. Hello?

The Ministry Setting (vv.15-17)

Jesus practiced constant, humble dependence on God the Father who sent him and on God the Holy Spirit who guided and empowered him. The Father's will, the Spirit's presence, the Son's humble obedience: this is the Trinitarian cooperation that stands behind Jesus' words and deeds. He was not distracted by fame or controlled by the urgency of human need. He did the important thing always and first, and it was the Father through the Spirit who determined what *the next important thing* was. Jesus engaged people with teaching and healing; he then withdrew from their exhausting demands for periods of prayer and spiritual refilling, verse 16, "But he withdrew to the wilderness and prayed." It's where the power came from, and the fullness he received in solitude he poured out like a mighty river in public.

Luke is careful to create a plausible setting and cast of characters.⁷ It's a typical day, and Jesus is doing the typical thing- teaching the reign and rule of God, verse 17: "On *one of those days*, when he was teaching..." Word has spread that strange things are happening in Galilee, so Jesus is now being checked out by religious leaders who, Luke notes, come "from *every* village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem" (the big city!). The scene is a theological convention attended by

⁵ Mark 2:1-12 // Matthew 9:1-8. *Red italics* on the Scripture sheet indicate changes/ additions to Mark 2:1-12.

⁶ John 6:6.

⁷ The consensus of scholars is that verse 17 is a Lukan creation intended to create the cast and to introduce the theme of *power* which is an inclusion for 5:17-6:19.

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Pharisees and their technical specialists in Jewish law. They are the best of ancient Judaism, serious about applying the Mosaic law to the details of life and zealous to guard the honor of Yahweh, the Lord their God. They share Jesus' beliefs in a larger canon, in angels, and in the resurrection of the dead, so there is common ground.

Have you noticed? Religion gets sick when it puts more emphasis on what we do than on what God has done. When human traditions and regulations eclipse Scripture and the person of Jesus, religion gets sick. When no longer open to the surprises of God, religion gets sick. Here it's ancient and Jewish, but with us it's Christian. We are not exempt from their errors, particularly pastors since we have a necessary and good quality control function. This is why the church must continually return to Jesus and to the faith and practice of the early church. Without constant attention, the dark side of religion soon manifests itself as rigidity, respectability, regulation, resistance and control. Renewal is found as the Holy Spirit breathes fresh life into all the means of grace, one of which is careful attention to the Gospels.⁸

Among the Pharisees it was said, "This man Jesus of Nazareth is getting lots of press; we must check him out before he leads the people astray." I have the same responsibility- to guard the church against false doctrine and false prophets. I also know, from reading church history, that renewal rarely comes from the center but from around the messy edges. Jesus has no formal credentials but his own words and life. They are part of a revered scholastic tradition; he's an untrained upstart. They have the respect of the people; Jesus has their love. They come to inspect him only to find the tables reversed. It's good for pastors to guard the flock; it is also good to be corrected and rebuked by the same Jesus we claim to represent. Let some career-minded Methodist pastor hear about a genuine healing at some off-brand church and watch the reaction. Skepticism, unbelief, hostility, envy and fear. It's not pretty. There is more of the Pharisee and scribe in most of us than we are willing to admit.

Think of verse 17 as the announcement at a heavyweight fight. Luke the ringmaster grabs the mike, "In this corner, wearing the robes of scholarship and the cynical scowls of the sophisticated, the Pharisees and the scribes. And in the opposite corner wearing peasant garb and an infectious grin, *Jesus of Nazareth*." Then, in a footnote, Luke tells us who will win the bout, "And the power of the Lord was *with*

⁸ For an theological approach to renewal that values the riches of the church's full heritage, see William J. Abraham, *The Logic of Renewal* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), especially Chapter 9, "Renewal and the Quest for Intellectual Integrity," 153-172.

him to heal.” Jesus has resources of which they know little. To *heal*, not just to talk.

The word *power* is the Greek *dynamis*, which comes to us in words like *dynamite*, *dynamic*, *dynamo*. It’s divine energy to get things done, God’s personal, creative power. Pentecostal types speak of *the anointing* in an attempt to describe the mysterious but palpable presence of the Holy Spirit. Every week I spend hours in study and preparing for worship. I ought to- it’s my job: good flow, careful planning, biblical content, classical theology, local concerns, different type of prayers, old and new songs, but inside me the hope that God may do something not in the bulletin. Each week I gather the kindling and pray for the fire to fall!

We must understand- as I mentioned earlier- the radical dependence of Jesus. On his own he could do nothing; divine prerogative was laid aside in the incarnation.⁹ There stands the Son of God, pure and uncorrupted, yet powerless to heal. But with the Father guiding and the Holy Spirit supplying the *dynamis* of divine energy, Jesus regularly did the impossible. On his own powerless, but in Trinitarian cooperation great power flowed through him, and this was such an occasion, “and the power of the Lord was with him to heal.” Dr. Michael Harper offers help at this point:

“... the power and authority that Jesus had was not like a water supply which could be turned on and off at will.... There were occasions when the power was especially present and other occasions when, presumably, it was not. Sometimes this was due to the presence of unbelief or direct antagonism to his ministry. At there times there was no particular reason for the ebb and flow of healing grace. Those involved in a Christian healing ministry today would agree that the same happens in their experience. Sometimes the power is there and sometimes it isn’t, and there is often no clear explanation for such variation.”¹⁰

Healing, Part I: Forgiveness (vv.18-20).

The major difference between the professional religionists and the paralyzed man is

⁹ See Witherington, *A Shared Christian Life*, Chapter 3, “The Imitation of Christ- No Really!” 20-34 for a fine discussion of Jesus’ freely chosen limits so that he operates with the resources of Word and the Spirit without divine prerogatives as a real model.

¹⁰ *The Healings of Jesus* (Downer’s Grove, ILL: Inter-Varsity, 1986), 55.

that they came to observe, and he came for help.¹¹ I saw something in this text I had not seen before, and it's given me new freedom to pray, then leave the results to God. If his friends had no love for him and no hope in Jesus, they'd never have carried him to where Jesus was. But once their perseverance had torn through the roof and laid him before the Lord, their work was done. The story begins with the importance of human love, but that alone- good as it is- is not enough. All our praying is preliminary. The purpose of our intercession is to present people before the Lord Jesus Christ and then *to wait upon his action* and *cooperate with him where he leads*. There are things that will not happen until we pray, but it is not our prayers that make it happen. It's not primarily an issue of technique or getting the words right. It's about loving, yearning prayer yoked to practical action. Let us bring people to Jesus in persistent, faithful intercession. Let us use all the variable means to grace to offer them a bridge to God. And then, let us watch and wait for signs of divine activity and gifts of the Holy Spirit. We are God's stretcher bearers! Faith loves, faith prays, faith tears down barriers. Faith finds a way, faith builds a team and forms a plan; faith stretches human love to its limits and places broken people at the feet of Jesus. Faith waits in expectation to see what the Lord himself is doing in, through, beyond and in spite of our efforts. When you pray, see yourself as carrying a person into the presence of Jesus. Then wait and watch and listen and obey. It's all we can do.

In the fall of 2000, doctors diagnosed Pastor Ed Dobson- some of whose books I have read- with ALS (Lou Gehrig's), an incurable, fatal disease. They told him he had two to five years and most of that would be disabled. Ed wanted someone to anoint him with oil and pray for healing, someone who really believed in healing. So he invited a friend, a Pentecostal pastor who had regular healing services, to come and pray. Here's how Ed described what happened:

“It was one of the most moving evenings of my life. He began by telling stories of people he'd prayed for who were miraculously healed. He also told stories about people he had prayed for who were not healed and had passed away, receiving that ultimate healing. Before he prayed for me he gave some advice, ‘Don't become obsessed with getting healed, Ed,’ he said. ‘If you get obsessed, you'll lose your focus. Get lost in the wonder of God, and who knows what he will do for you.’”

¹¹ Larry Richards, *Every Miracle and Wonder in the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1998), 183.

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Dobson concludes, “This is some of the best advice I’ve ever received. Since that night, I’ve been trying to get- and stay- lost in the wonder of God.”¹²

Verse 20, “And when Jesus *saw their faith* he said, ‘Man, your sins are forgiven for you!’” Faith is not just an interior disposition of trust, though it is surely that. Faith is knowing the difference between what I can do and what I can’t. I’ve seen people with twisted bodies and beautiful, grace-filled souls, and I have seen people with beautiful bodies and corrupted souls. This man was doubly broken: a paralyzed body and unforgiven sin. Jesus not only saw *their* faith, he saw *his* need, and our friend’s first need was not physical healing. It was that both the inherited and actual barrier between this man and his heavenly Father be removed, and Jesus did just that with a powerful word of absolution, “I know the mind of the Father through the revelation of the Spirit, and I tell you: God your Father wipes you sins away now! They are gone!” We forget that disabled people are still sinners in need of forgiveness. Ours is the privilege of announcing forgiveness to all who come in need. Forgiveness, first in receiving it, then in lavishing it on others, is the doorway to wholeness, whether that wholeness includes physical healing or not.¹³

Are we to infer in this case that Jesus draws a direct linkage between the man’s sin and his paralysis? We don’t know.¹⁴ There are some cases where the link between sin and sickness is very direct: sexually transmitted diseases for the immoral, lung cancer for the smoker, cirrhosis for the drunkard, heart disease for the obese and sedentary, a mean spirit for the bitter who refuse to forgive, scars and wounds for the violent. Some problems we bring on ourselves. At other times the relationship is more indirect. The sins of others affect us through pollution, drunk drivers and unthinking carelessness. Then there is the most indirect but most significant of all, the fact that all of us are fallen creatures in a fallen world, subject to disease and tragedy and death and the flaws of our genetic inheritance. Whatever the linkage in this case, direct or indirect, Jesus did not explore it nor did he require the man confess it openly. Jesus knew, and the man knew Jesus knew as soon as he looked him in the

¹² Ed Dobson, *Seeing through the Fog* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2012), 110.

¹³ On the healing power of forgiveness, Norma Dearing, *Healing Touch* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen), Chapter 4, “Sin and Separation,” 59-71.

¹⁴ See the Appendix, p.16 of this sermon, for a chart of possibilities.

eye. It was Jesus' joy to set him free from his sins in a single amazing sentence."¹⁵

There is a great reservoir of healing power in this church at this moment, and it is the power of forgiveness received and extended. If you are willing to forgive, or at a minimum to be led in that direction if the wound is deep and old, you may be healed in body as well, though I cannot promise that. And if you are unwilling to forgive, you can just stay sick and miserable and cut off from whatever blessing God has for you. If we could see this church as God sees it, we would see a body paralyzed and gnarled in arthritic unforgiveness, and we would realize that whatever unforgiveness and bitterness we cherish cripples not only us but the whole church. You cannot at the same time harbor unforgiveness and claim to work for renewal; they are at deliberate cross purposes. When I stand before you each week I sense a dark mountain of unresolved issues I did not create but must deal with.

Christological Paradox (vv.21-24)

Histology is the study of cells, *Psychology* the study of the psyche or soul, and *Christology* is the technical name for the church's doctrine of Christ Jesus, typically subdivided into two parts, his person- *who he was*, and his work- *what he did*. In this case, the work of Jesus- claiming to know the mind of God in forgiveness, raises the question of his identity. "And the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, saying, 'Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God only.'"

To blaspheme is to impugn the prerogative of God by presumption, claiming to know what only God knows. Yet Jesus claims to know the mind of God about the state of this man's soul. Is that blasphemy? Either he is or is not authorized to do what he's doing. God the Father backed the Pharisees into a logical corner. Only if he knew ahead of time what was coming would Jesus have been bold enough to say, "Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Rise and walk?'"

Which is easier? is an easy question to answer. Forgiveness is invisible; it's easier because no one knows if anything happened. But to say *rise and walk* requires proof. The more visible of the two is healing, but if Jesus does the visible, the

¹⁵ For an introduction to formal confession, see Martin L. Smith, *Confession: Preparing for Confession in the Episcopal Church* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley), 1985. One reason for the explosion of counseling as a profession is because the church has abandoned the discipline of confession, absolution, and healing penance.

invisible is also proven. If the man walks, it means he's also been forgiven; and it means, furthermore, that Jesus is uniquely authorized to speak and act as God's agent. He acts on earth with the authority of heaven, and to use a family metaphor, he's God's Son, a spittin' image! This is the Christological issue. What Jesus did, and the freedom and confidence with which he did it, is a clue to *who he is*. If he know what only God knows and does what only God can do, then who is he? To that question, the church has some very precise answers which are summarized in the Creeds.

New agers like Marianne Williamson and Helen Schucman of the popular but heretical *A Course in Miracles* will tell you that Jesus was merely one in a long line of spiritual masters who actualized his Christ consciousness to a high level. And if he did, then so can you and become your own little god. One of Shirley MacLaine's mentors claims to have the answer: The real Jesus "became an adept yogi and mastered complete control over his body and the physical world around him."¹⁶ But Jesus was not a mere man who through spiritual discipline and mystical experience earned his way into the godhead, thus freeing himself of the effects of sin.¹⁷ He did not evolve his way upward in consciousness and find himself adopted into deity. Jesus is God the Son incarnate in flesh through his Virgin Mother Mary from the beginning. So to the question, "Who can forgive sins but God only?" Christians reply, "Jesus can; that's who he is. He come to us from within the single divine circle of the three-and-one God. Jesus is the visible member of the Holy Trinity. To do business with him, whether as a paralyzed man or sophisticated Pharisee, is to deal with God ontologically, and to both grace is given, though in different forms. To one the grace of forgiveness followed by healing. To the other the grace of rebuke and correction, hopefully leading to conversion. Now you know what's at stake here, and how high the stakes are whenever a person comes in contact with Jesus.

Healing, Part 2: Physical Healing (vv.24-26)

Verse 24, "But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins- he said to the paralytic, 'Rise, take up your bed, and go home.'" That

¹⁶ Quoted in Stanley Grenz, *What Christians Really Believe & Why* (Louisville, KY: WJK, 1998), 91.

¹⁷ The technical name for this error is *Adoptionism*. See Rachel Muers, "Adoptionism: Is Jesus Christ the Son of God by nature or by adoption?" in Ben Quash and Michael Ward, editors, *Heresies and How to Avoid Them* (Peabody, MASS: Henrickson, 2007), 50-58.

is not a prayer of petition but a prayer of command, not a word going up asking God to act but a word coming down because Jesus through the Spirit knows what is about to happen and so speaks with confidence. It took faith for Jesus to speak those words; if the Spirit had not energized them in the man’s ear and in his very flesh, nothing would have happened, and Jesus would have been exposed as a fraud and false prophet. But at his word withered muscles contract, atrophied tendons stretch and pop under the influence of an invisible hand massaging life into dead limbs. Verse 25, “And immediately he rose before them, and took up that on which he lay, and went home, glorifying God.” The power that at the end of the age will raise the dead and scrub the cosmos clean, the *dynamis* that raised Jesus as the first example of a new humanity, that same divine energy rebuilt a man in front of their eyes as a preview of coming attractions. This is what full salvation looks like: a man made whole and full of praise! Later on he would die like everyone else, but beginning now he had a delicious taste of the resurrection love of God.

Never have I seen such a dramatic miracle, though I’ve read many credible reports and am not a skeptic.¹⁸ I’ve seen chronic back pain from a car wreck disappear overnight after a simple prayer. I saw a woman take off two arm braces for carpal tunnel and go back to work as a legal secretary. I’ve prayed for tumors that later disappeared from X-rays. I’ve also prayed many times- in fact most- with no tangible effect I could tell. My batting average is low, and there is much mystery! We are clogged pipes through which a little occasionally leaks, but with Jesus the pipes were wide open! For us it’s hard, for him it was second nature, literally!

God has never withdrawn healing ministry from the church.¹⁹ It has waxed and waned depending on the willingness of his people to study Scripture and act on the same in spite of skeptical philosophies which banish God to a safe distance. Remember, at our very best we are only stretcher bearers who present others before the Lord; we then watch and listen for gifts of the Holy Spirit. And the more we pray, the more we succeed and fail, the better we will become at cooperating with the Holy Spirit. It is an art both taught and caught and requires considerable risk. We

¹⁸ For a book of testimonies across history, see Cecil Murphey, Twila Belk, *I Believe In Healing* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2013)

¹⁹ The standard treatment remains Morton Kelsey, *Healing & Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1995) with chapters on healing across church history. For a polemical history, see Francis McNutt, *The Nearly Perfect Crime: How the Church Almost Killed the Ministry of Healing* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005).

Methodists are on a steep learning curve after many years of neglecting our own resources for healing. I will never stop praying for the sick, and I will never stop praying for medical people who bring all the array of science and technology to bear on human pain. In a mature church we say *both/and*, not *either/or*.

CONCLUSION

We have surveyed these twelve verses from multiple perspectives. One remains. This is not just a story from the past that informs our present but also a story from the future than shapes our perceptions. Jesus is no longer the earthly Jesus of Nazareth but the risen Lord- freed from space and time. And guess what? I am the paralyzed man. One day, unless an accident takes me, I will be reduced by aging or disease to this man's state. And then, at death, it will not be four earthly friends who bear me to the Lord but "a band of angels com'in after me, com'in for to carry me home." I will hear Jesus say, "Phil, my man, your sins are forgiven you. Rise, take up your bed, welcome home to my new world." And for the first time ever, I will be whole from the inside out and forever. I will look back and see all the graces that sustained me and gave hope along the way. Like the crowds I will be amazed, and like the paralyzed man I will glorify and enjoy God forever.

The film *Amazing Grace* chronicles the work of William Wilberforce as he endeavors to end the British transatlantic slave trade early in the nineteenth century. Wilberforce has made an earlier visit to his old pastor John Newton (author of the hymn, who himself captained a slave ship prior to his conversion. Wilberforce was hopeful his old friend would give an account of his slave-ship days. He refused; in his words, *the 20,000 ghosts* haunted him too greatly. But now, near success in legally ending the trade, Wilberforce visits again and discovers Newton has indeed recorded an account. The now blind man says, "You must use it. Names, ship records, ports, people, 'everything I remember is in here.' Though memory is fading, I remember two things very clearly: I'm a great sinner, and Christ is a great Savior."²⁰

This is the faith that sustains the church: appetizers now, banquet later; glimpses of healing now, full healing later. This is the faith that will sustain you in your living and in your praying and in your dying. Jesus Christ our great Savior will make us whole. God knows I need it; how about you? And what I can receive now, I want to receive, but for that which can only come later, I am willing to wait in hope.

²⁰ PreachingToday.com search under Mark 2:1-12.

**What Is The Relationship Between Sin (Rebellion v. God) And Sickness (Physical, Mental Consequences)?
(Discernment And Wisdom Are Always Required In Diagnosis. Combinations are the norm.)**

Cause	Description	Scope, Examples	Possible Responses	Cure	Key References
Personal setting: the world at odds with God	All humans share in a good but fallen world with original and actual sin plus exposure to evil and death. We are all limited, vulnerable, and mortal. We are in this together and all are affected. The earth and all its systems are not yet the kingdom of God which remains future.	Explains most sickness and troubles, e.g. cancers, genetic issues, infections, trauma, war, effects of aging, and finally death.	Use medical care where available and wise self-care always. Be frank about your world, your mortality and limits. Engage in regular confession of sin and receiving forgiveness. Follow Jesus Christ in his church and receive prayer for healing. Live in faith and hope.	Return of Christ, arrival of the kingdom of God and the resurrection of the dead with new bodies full of divine life forever beyond the power of sin, death, and evil at the end of the age. The ultimate healing is future. All present healings are temporary signs.	Genesis 3, 1 Cor. 15, Rev. 21
Personal God: God's holy love resists sin and evil	Sickness as chastisement from God	Some sickness, troubles	Acknowledge your specific sins, repent and receive absolution, turn to Christ and to his people for prayer and healing.	A restored relationship with God is possible now with many good effects.	Acts 5:1-16, 1 Cor. 11:27-34
Personal Foe: Satan, his fallen angels	Sickness as a result of an evil power, demonic activity, occult involvement, habitual sin and idolatry, family involvement.	Some sickness, troubles, particularly for those outside the faith, but not them only. Those who worship false gods come into bondage.	Conversion to Christ. Specific confession if necessary, prayers for deliverance and freedom, resisting evil, breaking hereditary involvement, renouncing idolatries, using the means of grace to strengthen us in the struggle.	Resist the enemy now. Learn his strategies and resist his temptations. Satan and the demons will be destroyed at the kingdom's coming and the advent of the new heavens and earth.	Luke 4:31-37, 8:1-3, 13:11-13, Rev. 21
Personal actions and attitudes: Me! You!	Sickness caused by the sins of another or of yourself. Includes war, addictions, pollution, violations of God's law and wisdom at every level of human interaction.	Quite a lot of sickness and troubles. Medical outcomes of addictions (e.g. cirrhosis, brain damage) and misbehaviors (e.g. promiscuity and STDs, abortion), unforgiveness.	<u>Sins by another:</u> honest confrontation, forgiveness, restitution, justice, peacemaking. <u>Sin by the self:</u> confess, repent, receive prayer for healing, restitution, Christian growth	Take responsibility for your actions and the guilt they bring and enable others to do the same by speaking the truth in love. Practice healthy boundaries, fellowship, mercy	Psalms 32, 51, Luke 5:17-26