

The Gospel According to Luke

“Spiritual Palsy” Chapter 5:17-26

Introduction

There was more than one paralytic in the room with Jesus. The Pharisees and teachers of the law who had come to hear Jesus were also severely paralyzed:

1. For one thing, they never moved a muscle to help bring the paralytic to Jesus.
2. For another, their heart-muscle was so hardened that they were upset Jesus had forgiven the sins of the paralytic.

Outwardly and physically they seemed fine and in good health. But inwardly and spiritually they suffered from the same malady as the paralytic. Everyone in the room (with the exception of Jesus) suffered from it. They were all born with inherited sin – born with what we call a sin nature. Then, throughout their lives, they had all committed individual acts of sin.

Sin is sometimes called in Scripture by the names of diseases in order to illustrate its awfulness. For example: In First Kings 8:38 sin is referred to as *“the plague of [your] own heart.”*

Ralph Robinson is quoted as saying, “There is not any sickness of the body but there is some distemper of the soul that might be paralleled with it, and bear the name of it.”

The story in Luke is intended to illustrate that there is a greater palsy that needs healing – your spiritual palsy of sin.

There is only one cure: **You need to have your sins forgiven.** The Pharisees and teachers of the law were right about one thing: God alone has the power to forgive your sins. Jesus was and is God. He

was present then, and is present now, with the power to forgive you and heal your spiritual palsy.

We'll organize our thoughts around two points this morning: #1 You're The Friend Of The Spiritual Paralytics Whose Sins Need Forgiving, and #2 You're The Former Spiritual Paralytic Whose Sins Were Forgiven.

#1 You're The Friend Of The Spiritual Paralytics
Whose Sins Need Forgiving
(v17-20)

The physical condition of the paralytic was a picture of the true spiritual condition of the human race – we are all paralyzed by sin. He will become a dramatic visual aid for Jesus to show His authority to forgive sin.

Luke 5:17 Now it happened on a certain day, as He was teaching, that there were Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting by, who had come out of every town of Galilee, Judea, and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was *present* to heal them.

The word for “**Pharisee**” comes from a Hebrew word that means *to divide* or *to separate*. The Pharisees probably developed after Ezra, the priest, taught the Jews the Law of Moses and called upon the people to live separated lives from the surrounding nations.

The “**teachers of the law**” were also called ‘scribes.’ As I understand them, they were teachers among the Pharisees – sort of super-Pharisees. As a footnote: The Jewish historian Josephus, tells us that there were approximately six-thousand Pharisees in Jesus’ time.

The Pharisees had a good, solid start under Ezra; but their movement soon became legalistic. They developed an elaborate system of interpreting God’s law, a strict set of practices, so that you knew what to do at all times in order to please God. These rules and regulations, rites and rituals, became a source of self-righteousness. They did nothing to affect the heart.

The Pharisees had the effect of putting religious burdens on the common people, but not helping to bear them. Nevertheless, the

people saw them as spiritual and respected them. In the context of our story, they were seen as the most spiritually healthy Jews.

The Pharisees and teachers of the law undoubtedly wanted to see if Jesus had the power to perform physical healings as had been reported. He did; but only to represent that He had the authority to completely heal a person by forgiving their sins and giving them eternal life.

While these guys were wondering about Jesus' ability to heal, "the power of the Lord was present to heal them." They were in worse condition than the paralytic, because they didn't suspect there was anything wrong with them. In verse thirty-one of this same chapter, Jesus will tell another group of Pharisees and teachers of the law,

Luke 5:31 ... "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick."

The whole human race is sick with sin. The Pharisees and scribes appeared spiritually healthy on the outside; but inside they were filled with sin. Rather than go around diagnosing others, they needed treatment.

Luke 5:18 Then behold, men brought on a bed a man who was paralyzed, whom they sought to bring in and lay before Him.

This would be an extreme case. He could do nothing for himself. In all likelihood the paralytic could not even speak. He lay around all day on his bed, drooling and having care-givers help him with his bodily functions.

He becomes a contrast to the religious leaders:

1. They see nothing wrong with or within themselves. Seated close to Jesus, they do not understand He was present with the power to heal them.
2. The paralytic has everything wrong with and within himself. Confined to his bed, far from Jesus, he understood the Lord was present with the power to heal him.

Or at least his friends did! They carried him to the house where Jesus was teaching. (By the way, it was probably Peter's house).

Luke 5:19 And when they could not find how they might bring him in, because of the crowd, they went up on the housetop and let him down with *his* bed through the tiling into the midst before Jesus.

The crowd would not clear a path for them to get in to see the Lord. This is a sad commentary in that this guy was arguably the person most worse-off that day. Common decency dictates you defer to those who have the greater need.

Honestly, somebody should have asked the Pharisees and teachers of the law to give-up their chief seats to make way for the paralytic. Maybe I'm reading into this, but I think sometimes we don't see more of the Lord's power because we are not sensitive to our surroundings. Be aware of what is happening around you – especially when believers have gathered around the Word.

The crowd sets-up the demolition of Peter's roof. The houses in Capernaum had flat, earthen roofs with tiles laid over support rafters, then packed with mud. Since roofs served as patios most houses had an outdoor stairway leading to the roof. At least four men carried the paralytic up these outside stairs to the rooftop patio; they carefully calculated just where Jesus was seated below them; then began removing the roof.

Just picture it - Jesus in the house, thronged with people, when suddenly debris starts falling into the house from the roof until a man is let down, probably by four ropes tied to the corner of his mattress, right in front of the Lord! It's an usher's worst nightmare!!

Luke 5:20 When He saw their faith, He said to him, "**Man, your sins are forgiven you.**"

What everyone else "**saw**" was rude, interruptive behavior. They "**saw**" men vandalizing a roof! Jesus "**saw their faith.**" Certainly He saw what was in their hearts. But even you and I can 'see' their faith by their actions.

Everyone in that room ought to have been embarrassed and ashamed that they had blocked the way to Jesus for the paralytic. We would do well to constantly ask ourselves, *“Are we doing anything to block people from coming to Jesus?”* Obviously I don’t think we are or else we’d change our habits or practices! But it is something that we want to be sensitive to.

Here was a man in the greatest physical need possible. A paralytic, unable to move, undoubtedly unable to speak; all of his bodily processes had to be cared for by others. Yet Jesus spoke to his deeper need: The spiritual healing that can only come by having your sins forgiven.

What sins can a paralyzed man commit, anyway? It speaks of your sin nature that pervades every part of your life. Whether or not this man was born a physical paralytic, he was definitely born a spiritual paralytic. He was born already dead in trespasses and sins, his heart plagued by inherited sin.

How could Jesus forgive his sins? In order to forgive his sins, God sent his one and only Son to this world. John 3:16 says, *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”* In order to give us the grace of forgiveness, the Son of God became the Lamb of God. In John 1:29, John the Baptist said, *“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”* In order to give us the grace of forgiveness of sin, the Son of God shed his blood in such a sorrowful way. In Revelation 5:12 John saw angels singing of Jesus, *“Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!”* Jesus has the authority to forgive men’s sins.

The crowd surrounding him, or his friends up on the roof, or the paralytic himself, may have been wanting to hear Jesus say, *“Man, your paralysis is gone!”* But when the Lord said to him, *“Your sins are forgiven,”* spiritual life would have so filled his heart as to render his paralysis meaningless.

Do you agree with that? I was watching a video several years ago, a Christian video about AIDS. Those being interviewed were dying of

AIDS, but had become Christians. I'll never forget the words of one of those terminal individuals: He said he would rather have AIDS and know Jesus than not have AIDS but not know Jesus. The forgiveness of his sins had rendered his physical condition meaningless because he was headed for heaven.

This man was carried along to Jesus when he could do nothing for himself. Faith carries us along into the presence of Jesus when we can do nothing for ourselves, when we are spiritual paralytics.

God uses means for faith to carry us to Jesus. His Word, anointed by His Spirit, carries us to Jesus. "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."¹ God's Spirit anointed Word comes to you in many ways... **But especially by friends who recognize your helpless condition!**

You are the friend of some spiritual paralytic. All you have to do is remember that you, too, were once a spiritual paralytic.

#2 You're The Former Spiritual Paralytic Whose Sins Were Forgiven (v21-26)

The room was filled with folks who needed to have their sins forgiven – including the Pharisees and teachers of the law. Rather than exercising faith, they found fault:

Luke 5:21 And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, "Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

They may have been musing in their hearts, or muttering among themselves; but they all came immediately to the same theological conclusion: Since only God can forgive sins, this was blasphemy. Blasphemy, by the way, is claiming either to be God or to do what only God can do.

Luke 5:22 But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, He answered and said to them, "**Why are you reasoning in your hearts?**"

¹Romans 10:17

Luke 5:23 Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Rise up and walk'?

God the Father gave Jesus a Word of Knowledge to know what they were musing and muttering. He busted them and asked His probing question. It's easier to say, "Your sins are forgiven," because it can't really be verified. "Rise up and walk" is harder to say, because it either happens or it doesn't.

Luke 5:24 But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins" - He said to the man who was paralyzed, "I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house."

Jesus called Himself "the Son of Man" for the first time. It was a phrase familiar to the Jews, especially the scribes of the Pharisees who spent time researching their Scriptures. The prophet Daniel used the phrase to describe the promised Messiah. More than just claiming to be both God and their Messiah, Jesus was challenging these students of Scripture. If the Messiah was One Who had power to heal... And if Jesus was performing these healings that only their Messiah could do... Well, *you do the math!*

The Pharisees and scribes had a saying: "*A sick man does not recover from his sickness until all his sins are forgiven him.*" It's not true, by the way; but since it was what they believed, God was willing to meet them on their level.

Luke 5:25 Immediately he rose up before them, took up what he had been lying on, and departed to his own house, glorifying God.

There is a sub-theme in these verses regarding faith and works. We've seen that the paralytic's friends had a faith that showed itself in their works. Now the formerly paralyzed man shows his faith by his works: He picks-up his mat, as ordered, and goes home, as ordered. Faith that reveals itself in obedient works glorifies God.

When someone glorifies God, it can become contagious:

Luke 5:26 And they were all amazed, and they glorified God and were filled with fear, saying, "We have seen strange things today!"

If you are a Christian, **you** are the former spiritual paralytic whose sins have been forgiven. When your faith in God reveals itself through obedience; when your faith works; you glorify God and challenge others to do the same.

The former paralytic was instantly healed. It's a picture of the instantaneous and complete spiritual healing you receive when you are brought to Jesus by grace through faith. Old things pass away – old habits and behaviors; all things become new.

God's forgiveness involves the *penalty*, the *presence*, and the *power* of sin:

1. You are forgiven from the penalty of sin, which is death. Don't get me wrong – you may die; but you will not be separated from God for eternity. You will be absent from your body to be present with the Lord and taken to a glorious mansion in heaven.
2. You will, therefore, one day be free from the presence of sin. In heaven, with the Lord, there will be no sin with its sickness, sorrow, and sadness.
3. In the mean time... Sin is still present, both within you and surrounding you. But Jesus can give you power over sin – power to overcome it.

Conclusion

The people concluded, “**We have seen strange things today.**” The word for “strange” is where we get our English word *paradox*. To us, a paradox is a *contradiction*. But the word in our text originally meant *beyond expectation*.

We know God still has the power to heal. We pray for Him to do so. If He doesn't, then we think of it as a *paradox* in the sense of being a contradiction: It's contrary to what we desire.

The truth is, if God doesn't heal, it's really something *beyond expectation*. He's not doing something less than we've asked, but beyond what we've asked: He's providing the grace sufficient to endure the sickness in a way that glorifies God.

God's deep, spiritual work in your heart is a work wonderfully beyond expectation. Rather than finding fault when a physical healing is withheld... Follow God by faith and the glory you bring to God will become contagious.