

The Greatest Truths of All Time

Session 2

September 14, 2025

The Greatest Need

The Point: Only Jesus can take care of our need for forgiveness.

Session Passage: Luke 5:17-26

Luke 5:17-19

Connection to the Point. Because Jesus has the power to heal, some men brought their paralyzed friend to Him.

Luke the Gospel writer. Luke, a Gentile, traveled with Paul on some of Paul's missionary journeys. Paul identified him as "the dearly loved physician/ beloved physician /dear friend Luke, the doctor" (Col. 4:14). Early church fathers identified Luke's hometown as Antioch. Luke wrote both the Gospel of Luke and Acts. Many Bible scholars believe he wrote these books while in Rome with Paul during the apostle's first Roman imprisonment. Certain sections in the book of Acts, often called "we sections," utilize the pronoun "we" and indicate that Luke was with Paul during those times (see Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-28:16).

The Gospel of Luke. Luke's Gospel is the third and longest book in the New Testament. Luke identified his purpose for writing in Luke 1:1-4. He wanted to confirm for Theophilus, perhaps an individual in high social or political standing, "the certainty of the things" that Theophilus had been taught. In so doing, Luke presented an orderly, carefully investigated, historical account of Jesus's life and ministry. Although Luke was not an eyewitness to Christ's earthly life and mission, he was in close contact with many who were. Luke's Gospel reflects a concern for those who were poor and regarded as outcasts. Examples include people with leprosy, tax collectors, and a widow with her small offering. Luke called positive attention to Gentiles (Luke 4:27; 7:1-10), women (8:1-3), and Samaritans (10:29-37). Thus his historical record appeals to people from various backgrounds.

On one of those days while he was teaching (v. 17). Jesus's ministry included teaching as well as healing (Matt. 4:23). His teaching astonished the crowds because unlike the scribes He taught with authority (7:28-29). Jesus's Sermon on the Mount provides His solid foundational teaching for living the Christian life (Matt. 5-7). Jesus also often used parables to make His point. Parables provide a vision of life in God's kingdom. They are stories that put one thing alongside another for the purpose of comparing and providing a new understanding. Jesus frequently used illustrations from common, everyday life to reveal the nature of God's kingdom (see Luke 15). The account of Jesus's healing the paralyzed man in Luke 5 occurs within the context of His larger teaching and healing ministry. The news about Him had spread and large crowds gathered to listen to Him and to be healed (5:15).

Pharisees and teachers of the law (v. 17). The designation *Pharisee* means "separated one." The label may convey the fact that they separated themselves from the masses of people and to the study of the law. The Pharisees appear to have been responsible for the transition of Judaism from a religion of sacrifice to one of law. As the largest and most important Jewish group in the New Testament, they

numbered around six thousand. The Pharisees viewed obedience to the law as the way to God. They developed the oral tradition surrounding the Mosaic law. The Pharisees accepted all of the Old Testament as authoritative Scripture. They believed in angels, demons, and the resurrection of the body. The Pharisees opposed Jesus because He rejected their interpretations of the law. Although individuals could be *teachers of the law* or scribes without also being Pharisees, most scribes were Pharisees.

Judea . . . Jerusalem (v. 17). Luke may have mentioned Judea and Jerusalem at the beginning of this account of the healing of the paralyzed man for a specific purpose. The controversy between Jesus and the religious leaders over this healing foreshadows the conflict that will later occur in Jerusalem and lead to Jesus's crucifixion.

The Lord's power to heal was in him (v. 17). The title *Lord* in this context refers to Yahweh or God. With this statement, Luke prepared us for the miracle of healing to follow. These words also reveal Luke's emphasis on the Spirit's presence with Jesus (see 3:21-22; 4:1, 14, 18-21, 36). The Greek word rendered *power* when transliterated or written in English appears very similar to our term *dynamite*. Jesus healed in the power of the Lord God. The Gospel writer did not mean that this power was intermittent. Rather, Luke called attention to its presence on this occasion associated with Jesus's healing ministry as well as on other occasions (see 4:36; 6:19; 8:46; 9:1). As the Son of God, Jesus was filled with God's power. He possesses the power now as well as then to meet our physical needs.

Stretcher (vv. 18, 19, 24). The Greek term translated *stretcher* designates a small bed. Apparently a rope had been attached to each corner of the bed. In any case the stretcher was light enough that the paralyzed man could carry it away by himself after Jesus healed him (v. 25).

Went up on the roof (v. 19). The house roofs in first-century biblical Palestine were basically flat. Typically people could climb to the roof by an outside stairway. Roofing materials, whether tiles as the case in this situation or mud thatch, could be separated without causing permanent damage. Determined to bring a paralyzed man to Jesus, some men carried him to the roof on a *stretcher*, tore a hole in the tiles, and lowered him in front of the Master.

Luke 5:20-21

Connection to the Point. Jesus did what only God can do and forgave the paralyzed man.

Their faith (v. 20). This phrase designates the faith of both the paralyzed man and his stretcher bearers. For the paralyzed individual and his companions this faith can be described as faith in Jesus as One who had come from God with power to heal. For readers of the Gospel of Luke faith embraced a greater understanding of who Jesus is as the risen Lord. These men demonstrated their faith by their "works" (Jas. 2:18). They not only carried their friend to the place where Jesus was ministering but also persisted in setting their friend's *stretcher* in front of Him. Luke repeatedly recorded Jesus as responding to believers with the expression "Your faith has saved you" (Luke 7:50; 8:48; 17:19; 18:42). Jesus's observation of the faith of both the paralyzed man and his friends calls attention to the fact that God

responds to our prayers of intercession regarding people in need. Of course, it does not mean that the faith that believes in Jesus for personal salvation can ever be by proxy.

Your sins are forgiven (v. 20). Jesus didn't begin by dealing with the paralysis for which the man's friends had brought him to Jesus. Instead, He responded to the group's faith by addressing the paralyzed man's greatest need—his spiritual need for forgiveness of sins. Jesus forgave the man of his sins. The term translated *sins* is the common word meaning “missing the mark.” The scribes and Pharisees clearly understood that in pronouncing forgiveness Jesus was claiming to be God (v. 21). The form of the Greek verb rendered *are forgiven* stresses the continuing and enduring state of this forgiveness.

The scribes (v. 21). Scribes were individuals trained in writing skills. In the Old Testament they kept records of important events and decisions. Baruch served as the prophet Jeremiah's scribe and recorded Jeremiah's words (Jer. 36:26-27). After the Southern Kingdom of Judah fell in 586 BC, the Babylonians took much of Judah's population into exile. During their time of exile in Babylon, the scribes apparently became experts in God's written Word. Scribes not only copied and preserved the Scripture, but also they taught it. Ezra was one such scribe (Ezra 7:1-10). By New Testament times a professional group of scribes had developed. They interpreted the law and taught it. They functioned as experts in dealing with cases where individuals were accused of breaking the law of Moses. The scribes desired to put Jesus to death because His teachings often conflicted with their interpretations of the law (Luke 19:47). Most of the scribes were .

Who is this man (v. 21)? This crucial question, unspoken by the religious leaders, is key to understanding the entire account of the paralyzed man's healing. The record in the following verses answers this question but in a way that the scribes and Pharisees refused to accept. Jesus is the Son of Man who possesses not only the divine authority to forgive sins but also the divine power to heal.

Blasphemies (v. 21). This term transliterates a Greek word meaning “to speak harm.” The Jewish leaders regarded Jesus as a blasphemer because He claimed to do what God alone can do. Anyone who asserted he could forgive sins was putting himself on an equal level with God. Blasphemy in Jewish law was a capital offense penalized by stoning. When Jesus went on trial before the Sanhedrin, the court's members charged Him with blasphemy (Mark 14:63-64). In reality the real blasphemers were those who denied that Jesus is the Messiah. The sin of blasphemy can be forgiven. However, there is a sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit that cannot be forgiven (Matt. 12:22-32). Why? Because this sin is a state of hardness in which an individual consciously and willfully resists God's saving power and grace. An individual in this state cannot be forgiven because the person cannot recognize and repent of the sin. A person fearful of committing blasphemy against the Holy Spirit and desiring to repent cannot have committed blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

Who can forgive sins but God alone (v. 21). Jesus exercised divine prerogative and power in forgiving the paralyzed man's sins. The Pharisees correctly recognized that reality. Anyone who claimed to forgive sins was putting himself on an equal level with God. Jesus as the Son of God takes care of our greatest need—the need for forgiveness.

Forgive (v. 21). The Greek verb is derived from a verb meaning “to send away.” The same Greek verb appears in Leviticus 16:10 of the Septuagint, a major Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. That verse describes the sending away of the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement. This goat was sent away into the wilderness and symbolically carried all the sins of the Israelites (Lev. 16:21-22). Although the scapegoat is not mentioned by name in the New Testament, the writer of Hebrews contrasted forgiveness through Christ’s once-for-all sacrifice with the blood of bulls and goats that can never take away sins (Heb. 10:3-17).

Luke 5:22-26

Connection to the Point. Jesus proved His authority to forgive by doing something else only God can do: He healed the paralytic.

Why are you thinking this in your hearts? (v. 22). In the biblical world the heart was the center of the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual life of human beings. It came to represent the person as a whole. The heart and the intellect were closely connected (Matt. 13:15). People associated the heart with thinking processes. It constituted the place of decision-making (2 Cor. 9:7). The heart was not only linked with activities of the mind and the will but also with a person’s emotions and affections (John 16:6). Depravity also issues from the heart (Matt. 15:19). Because the heart is at the root of the human problem of sinfulness, God promised that with the coming of the Messiah, He would give a new heart and a new spirit (Ezek. 36:26). Thus in the New Testament the hearts of believers become the dwelling place of Christ (Eph. 3:14-19).

Son of Man (v. 24). This verse records the first appearance of this title for Jesus in the Gospel of Luke. It occurs in connection with His authority to pronounce forgiveness. In the Gospel of Luke the phrase is always used by Jesus. This title was Jesus’s favorite Self-designation to imply both His full humanity and His messianic mission. The use of the *Son of Man* title in the Gospels generally falls into three basic categories. (1) The most frequent appearance of the title is in connection with Jesus’s reference to His future coming with great power and majesty (see Luke 21:27). (2) Jesus also used the designation in reference to His suffering, death, and resurrection (see 9:44; 24:7). (3) Finally, Jesus referred to Himself by this title in connection with His earthly ministry. This group of references typically illustrates His lowly estate (9:58). Jesus probably used the title *Son of Man* of Himself because it did not carry the political overtones associated with the title *Messiah* in the popular thinking of first-century biblical Palestine. The designation Son of Man conveyed both Jesus’s humanity and His divinity. In the Old Testament the expression typically called attention to humanity’s frailty and insignificance in contrast to God’s greatness and power (see Ps. 8:4). On the other hand the title was closely connected with Daniel 7:13, which was viewed as a messianic prophecy. The passage states that “one like a son of man was coming with the clouds of heaven and “approached the Ancient of Days” On trial before the Sanhedrin, Jesus responded to the high priest’s question, “Are you the Messiah” by quoting from Daniel 7:13 (Mark 14:61-62). His response made clear His messianic claim.

Authority(v. 24). The Greek word literally means “power.” However, it is a different word from the Greek term rendered “power” in Luke 5:17. The term in verse 24 (*exousia*) can refer to physical power, mental power, or the power to rule or govern. Power is both the ability to act to produce a desired result and the possession of authority over others. Scripture frequently brings together these two aspects of power. For example God demonstrated His power by delivering the Israelites from Egyptian bondage. His mighty acts were foundational for His claim of authority over Israel (see Ex. 20:1-17). Christ’s miracles provided evidence of God’s power at work in His ministry (Luke 5:17). Luke emphasized the Holy Spirit’s role in empowering Jesus’s ministry (4:14). Jesus’s power included not only the authority to condemn sin (John 15:22), but also to forgive it as demonstrated in His healing the paralyzed man (Luke 5:24-25). Jesus’s *authority* to meet our greatest need verifies His divinity.

Astounded (v. 26). This Greek term is actually a noun that literally means “a standing out.” Our word *ecstasy* appears very similar to the Greek word. The term can refer to a person being thrown into a state of blended wonder and fear. It can also indicate a person being transported into a trance. Although the individual is awake, the person’s mind is drawn away from all surrounding objects and wholly fixed on things divine. In that state the individual seems to perceive with physical eyes and ears realities revealed by God. Luke used the same term in Acts 10:10 to identify Peter’s “trance” when God gave him a vision of various unclean animals to convince the apostle that the gospel was for Gentiles as well as Jews. See also Acts 11:5 where the word is again rendered “trance.”

Incredible things (v. 26). The Greek word translated *incredible things* appears quite similar to our English term *paradox* and occurs only here in the New Testament. The term refers to unexpected, uncommon, wonderful, or extraordinary things or events.

Today (v. 26). The use of the term *today* at the end of this passage both in the Greek text and in the CSB recalls its use at the beginning of Jesus’s address after reading the messianic passage from Isaiah in the Nazareth synagogue (Luke 4:21). At that point He had announced that the messianic kingdom had come in Him. The other Gospel accounts of the healing of the paralyzed man do not include the word *today* (Matt. 9:2-8; Mark 2:3-12). By his inclusion of the term, Luke called attention to the reality that the long awaited kingdom of God had indeed come in Jesus.