

Luke 5:17-26

Wait...what? God's storyline.

In this passage we find a man who is paralyzed and seeking healing being brought before Jesus and while there are a number of things we can learn from this exchange, today we'll focus on three...

Jesus Identity - Who Jesus is
Kingdom priorities
Jesus's mercy and compassion

But before we get into that, I want to establish a basic, but foundational principle with you. And here is the principle – There is one big, overarching story that God is working out through history that began with creation and the first sin, the first coming of Jesus to make things right through His death and resurrection, and ends, as far as we know, with Jesus's return to establish His visible, formal kingdom on earth. But inside of that are tons of stories – some big like Noah's ark and the Exodus and many smaller ones – like the Penders move to Massachusetts. And these individual stories are like individual threads of different colors and lengths and characteristics that God weaves together throughout history that build the big, overarching story. If you accept this principle – it changes the way we interpret the big events in our lives, the unexplainable, painful things, but also the comings and goings of everyday life. We don't have the full perspective to see how these things weave together, but as Christians we trust that they do. That is, at least in part, the spirit behind Romans 8:28. And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose. OK – so with that principle in view - let's jump into the first part in today's passage – Jesus's Identity.

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?"

Who can forgive sins but God alone? - Exactly! That was Jesus's point – He was identifying Himself as God. But let's give the Pharisees some slack here. The notion of a man forgiving sins was not accepted and they rightly wanted to protect the honor and holiness of God. Additionally, their theology around the Messiah did not include the ability or authority of the Messiah to forgive sins. To say that the Jewish people as a whole struggled to fit Jesus into their view of the Messiah is one thing, but if you then add on another complexity about the identity of Jesus being both God and man – then their first instinct that Jesus is blasphemous is not illogical, but how they respond after being confronted by Jesus is critical. So it is the same for us. History is clear is that Jesus walked the earth. The question then is what do you do with what Jesus said about

Himself, the miracles He performed, and the 500 people who saw Him risen from the dead? If we believe it to be true – then it should have tremendous impact in our lives. Not just in a prayer-of-salvation sort of way, but in the way we live our lives everyday with Him as our king, in the hope and confidence and power which we can have in this life. So how will you respond to Jesus? This is not merely a rhetorical question for us to consider. It is immensely consequential to everyone, but it is not just a question for those who don't yet know Jesus – as a believer, how are you living your life that reflects Him as your king?

Knowing Jesus and responding to Him is the overarching point of this exchange. And when you realize that Jesus is king and His kingdom is so much more expansive than my solitary, 80 years on earth, then it's conceptually easier to agree that there will be times when His priorities are more important than my immediate circumstances. This is the second major point – Kingdom Priorities. Sooo, let's unpack that for a moment. When the paralytic hears from Jesus, I call this a "Wait... what?" moment. It is one of those instances when you are expecting one thing and get another. Like you order a nice juicy bacon cheeseburger and get a piece of baked chicken? I remember when I asked Bari's dad for her hand in marriage. A nervous time for sure. We were visiting their house over Thanksgiving break and the girls were going out shopping. We stayed behind to do important things like watching football. I had been planning this opportunity and rehearsing what I would say. I didn't have any particular reason to believe that he would say no, but for some reason that did not soothe my nerves very much. So 20 years ago I found Mr. Barwis upstairs in his home and laid it out there – I wanted to marry his daughter. I held my breath and anticipated an "ah, mark that's great" or something similar. Instead I heard, "well mark, we should talk about that." Wait...what? I was stunned. I hung my spinning head and started down the stairs. "What does that mean? If it isn't a simple yes, then that can't be good..." I was about halfway down the stairs when he added, "by the way – the answer is yes." Whew!

For the "Wait...What?" moment in this story, it helps to put yourself in the shoes of the paralytic for a moment. You've heard about Jesus and the miraculous, merciful healings he has performed at this early stage of His ministry. Being paralyzed at this point in time was really difficult because financially there was not any government support for you, there are not the tools and technology of today, and if you're paralyzed you're not likely working. Secondly, there was often a stigma associated with difficulties people faced or the burdens they bore. It was often assumed that if you are sick or disabled, it must be the result of some sin in your life. We know from John 9 that this is not always the way in which God works and we should not assume such. In John 9, Jesus and the disciples come upon a man blind from birth. The disciples ask Jesus – who sinned that this man was born blind – him or his parents? There was a presumption that there was a sin that triggered the blindness. Jesus responded. 3 "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him." The Kingdom Priority of the works of God were greater than the 30 years of burden that this man bore being blind. Back to the man on the bed in today's

story - in spite of this stigma, you've got some good friends who have brought you to this miracle worker (can we be friends like that – that's a different sermon). Siri tells you you've arrived at the address. There is an initial barrier just because of the crowd between you and Jesus, but your friends get creative and lower you through the roof to a spot in front of Jesus. So the whole crowd has stopped – they're looking, waiting to see what happens next. Jesus recognizes the faith of you and your friends; your excitement builds and Jesus tells you – “Son, your sins are forgiven!” Wait...What?? Jesus, I came to you because I wanted to walk! Having my sins forgiven is certainly good, don't get me wrong, but...

I think we've probably all had those moments with God. God I was praying for this, and you gave me that. I was praying for healing, but things have only gotten worse. I was praying for a promotion, not to be laid off. I was praying for Christian neighbors, not this family to move next door. I was praying my child would clean up their act, but they just got suspended, again. God, didn't you hear me? Don't you understand? Don't you know how great this would be for your kingdom? The answer is yes – He heard you, He understands, and He knows the impact on His kingdom. But He knows a lot more than I do. With this paralytic man, Jesus knew that his eternal condition, having his sin forgiven, was more important than the immediate, relatively short-lived circumstance of his paralysis. And that with his eternal condition being made right, paralysis would not be an option in Heaven. When Julia was born and going through some difficult times, it brought home for me how easy it is to say something like this and how difficult it is to truly live it out. I had to learn to prioritize prayer for Julia's soul over Julia's seizures and hemiparesis. It did not mean I didn't pray for Julia's healing, but I had to keep in perspective that her eternal condition was much more important. Again, in Heaven we can rest knowing that all the wrongs of this world will be made right. Similarly, there are all kinds of intricate stories being woven together for God's glory right now. Without God's perspective, we see only what we see and think that is best. But faith teaches us, that the bigger story that God is weaving together is much better when it follows His script and not mine. Because in that story, is the crowd and in that crowd are people who need Jesus. And on the other side of that conversation is Jesus – who is worthy of all glory and honor and praise – and things should work out to that end.

But don't get me wrong. While the big story God is weaving together is more important, we have a compassionate God. That is our third point today – Jesus's compassion and mercy. The Bible is replete with God's compassion – the very fact that Jesus is in their midst is a huge one. In the account prior to this one in Luke 5:12-16 Jesus heals a leper. Jesus had the power to speak and heal Him, but Luke adds the detail that “Jesus reached out and touched the man.” Why is this significant? When you're a leper, physical contact with other people probably isn't happening. Aside from the gross and infection factors, the law of Moses said that to touch a leper made you ceremonially unclean and defiled. But Jesus's compassion for the man was greater than His regard for ceremonial rules. Jesus is compassionate.

When Jesus is asking the crowd, “Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk’? But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” He is weaving together the stories, the individual threads of this man and his friends, the crowd, and the Pharisees to establish His identity for the nation of Israel, the eternal condition of the man, and the compassion for the man’s paralysis. “Pick up your bed and go home.” Healing the man’s paralysis was an outward symbol of the internal cleansing of his soul. Praise the Lord! That’s a win-win-win. The story doesn’t always end like that, but we can trust it is a win for God’s kingdom when we faithfully pray and trust Him. Be encouraged:

2nd Corinthians 4:14-18

because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself. All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God. Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Some of you may know the story of Chuck Colson – he was known as the hatchet man for President Nixon and was a central figure in the Watergate scandal. He was a successful person by many standards – graduated Brown University with honors, George Washington law school, youngest Marine to achieve captain, successful in political campaigns, and, at the age of 38, Special Council to the most powerful man in the world. He was a vicious, ruthless political force and there were few lows he would not stoop to advance his cause. As more and more information leaked about Watergate and President Nixon’s recordings, Colson was a top target of investigations. During this time, Chuck came to know Jesus as Lord. The prosecution was having a difficult time for charges to stick to Chuck – most of what he had done had been morally wrong, but not criminal. In a leap within his new-found faith, Colson decided to volunteer the things that he had done that were criminal and expected mercy and leniency from the court for doing so. He was wrong and went to prison and lost his license to practice law. Many saw his “conversion” experience as a ploy to avoid harsher punishment and would mock Chuck after sentencing when he said “What happened in court today was the court’s will and the Lord’s will. I have committed my life to Jesus Christ and I can work for him in prison as well as out.” Others involved in Watergate received an early release and Colson anticipated he might as well. He would not and was crushed as he learned his son had been arrested for drug possession and he could not be there to help his son in his time of need. At this low point he prayed: “Lord, if this is what this is all about, then I thank you. I praise you for leaving me in prison, for letting them take away my license to practice law – yes, even for my son being arrested. I praise you for giving me your love

through these men, for being God, for just letting me walk with Jesus.” This was a turning point for Chuck Colson as he said “For the first time I felt truly free.”

Shortly after his release, Chuck got audience with the federal director of prisons and laid out his vision for what would become prison fellowship ministries. In the 40 plus years since its inception, hundreds of thousands have learned of the hope of Jesus Christ in prisons throughout the world, thousands have been trained as leaders for the faith inside and ultimately outside the prison walls, demonstrating a lower recidivism rate, and each year thousands of children of prisoners receive gifts from their incarcerated parents to keep alive the bond of family. Chuck’s heart for these prisoners was forged while he was a prisoner himself. God used the lowest point of his life to bring hope and freedom to so many. Had Chuck Colson received the leniency and mercy he hoped for as a new believer when he confessed his wrongdoing to the judge, he may have read Isaiah 61:1 and Matthew 25:34-40 differently.

As we close, I just want to encourage you with a few points:

- 1) Jesus will forgive our sin when we humble ourselves before Him.
- 2) Jesus is compassionate – He knows what is going on and wants to hear from you. He wants to walk with you in the midst of your troubles today and with you in paradise in Heaven. He is still demonstrating His compassion today – there are stories all over this church.
- 3) God our King is alive and active and working in our midst to accomplish great things for His kingdom. Right now, He is weaving our stories together into something beautiful.