

The Gospel of Luke

Lesson 7: The Leper, the Paralytic, and the Call of Levi -- Luke 5:12-39

A man comes out of the shadows. He is covered with leprosy, which means he has spent years on the outside of everything: outside the village, outside the synagogue, outside the warm circle of family and friends, calling out "Unclean, unclean" so that no one would come near and catch what he carries. No one has touched him in a very long time. He has likely forgotten what a human hand feels like. And now he falls on his face before Jesus and says one of the most beautiful sentences in the Gospel: "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean" (v. 12). He does not doubt the power. He only wonders about the willingness. And Jesus, before He says a single word about healing, does the unthinkable. He stretches out His hand and touches the untouchable man. "I will; be clean" (v. 13).

Luke 5 is a chapter of doors thrown open. A leper is brought back inside the human family. A paralyzed man, lowered through a torn-up roof by friends who would not take no for an answer, hears words he never came for: "Man, your sins are forgiven you" (v. 20). A despised tax collector named Levi looks up from his table of coins, hears two words, "Follow me," and walks away from everything he has built (v. 27). In each scene Jesus reaches across a line that everyone else refused to cross, and in each scene the religious experts of the day are watching, calculating, and growing uneasy. The grace of God is on the move, and it does not respect the boundaries that men have drawn.

At the center of the chapter is a confrontation that goes to the very heart of who Jesus is. When He tells the paralytic that his sins are forgiven, the scribes and Pharisees are scandalized, and they are not entirely wrong to be. "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" they reason (v. 21). Exactly. That is the point. Rather than backing down, Jesus heals the man on the spot so that they may know "that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" (v. 24). He claims a prerogative that belongs to God, and then proves the claim by a miracle no one can deny. This is not a humble carpenter overreaching. This is God in the flesh, declaring what only God can declare.

By the end of the chapter Jesus is talking about wineskins and wedding feasts, and it can feel like a sudden change of subject. It is not. Something genuinely new has arrived in Him, and the old containers cannot hold it. The forms and shadows of the Law were never meant to be permanent. They pointed forward to a covenant He came to inaugurate. As you read these verses slowly, watch the hands of Jesus: touching a leper, lifting a paralytic, beckoning a tax collector. And watch your own heart. The same Lord who crossed every line to reach the people in this chapter is reaching, still, for you.

Group Discussion: When the leper says, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean" (v. 12), he has no doubt about Jesus' power, only about His willingness. Many of us are the same way: we

believe God could help us, but we secretly wonder whether He wants to. Where do you find it easier to trust God's ability than His willingness toward you personally? What might it do for our faith to settle, once and for all, the question of whether Jesus is willing?

Personal Reflection: Levi left his tax booth, his income, and his old life and "left everything, and rose and followed him" (v. 28), then threw a feast so his old friends could meet Jesus too. Is there something in your hands right now that following Jesus is asking you to release, or some table of friends He is asking you to invite Him into? What is the one thing you are most reluctant to leave behind, and why?

Read Luke 5:12-39

Study Questions

1. When the leper begs, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean," Jesus "stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, 'I will; be clean'" (vv. 12-13). Under the Law a leper was unclean and untouchable, yet Jesus touches him without becoming unclean himself. What does this scene reveal about who Jesus is, about the nature of His holiness, and about the way He deals with people the world has cast aside?
2. After cleansing the leper, Jesus "would withdraw to desolate places and pray" (v. 16), even as the crowds pressed in and His fame grew. When demands on you increase and people need you, what is your honest pattern, and what does it say that the sinless Son of God made deliberate, repeated retreats to pray?
3. Four friends tore open a roof and lowered a paralyzed man down to Jesus, and "when he saw their faith" Jesus said, "Man, your sins are forgiven you" (vv. 19-20). What does it tell us that Jesus addressed the man's sin before his paralysis, and what does this teach about our deepest need and about the value of bringing others to Christ?
4. Jesus saw a need no one in the room had named: this man came for healing, but Jesus dealt first with his sin. Who in your life are you tempted to help only at the surface level, and how might Jesus be calling you to care about people's deepest need and not merely their visible problems?
5. The scribes and Pharisees reasoned, "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" and Jesus, knowing their thoughts, healed the man so they would know "that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" (vv. 21-24). Were the scribes right that only God can forgive sins, and what is Jesus claiming about himself by both pronouncing forgiveness and proving it with a miracle?
6. When the paralytic walked, the crowd "were all amazed and glorified God, and they were filled with awe, saying, 'We have seen extraordinary things today'" (v. 26). When was the last time the works of God genuinely filled you with awe, and what tends to dull your wonder at what He has done in saving you?
7. Jesus called Levi, a tax collector, with two words, "Follow me," and Levi "left everything, and rose and followed him" (vv. 27-28). What does the call of Levi teach about the kind of

people Jesus calls, about the nature of discipleship, and about the response He is looking for?

8. Levi responded to grace by hosting “a great feast” so that a crowd of tax collectors and sinners could sit at the table with Jesus (v. 29). When God’s grace touches a person, it tends to overflow toward others. Who are the people in your life that respectable folks avoid, and what would it look like for you to bring them near to Jesus rather than keep them at a distance?
9. The Pharisees grumbled that Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners, and He answered, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance” (vv. 31–32). Then, when questioned about fasting, He spoke of new wine that cannot be poured into old wineskins (vv. 37–38). What is Jesus teaching here about why He came, and how does the picture of new wine and old wineskins point to the new covenant He brings, which cannot be confined to the old forms of the Law?
10. Look back across the whole chapter: a leper touched and made clean, a paralytic forgiven and raised up, a tax collector called and transformed, and the promise of a newness that will not fit inside the old. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses. What is the single truth from Luke 5:12–39 that you most need to carry into this coming week?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Leviticus 13:45–46, the isolation and uncleanness of the leper under the Law; Psalm 103:1–12, the God who forgives all our iniquity and heals all our diseases; Acts 2:38, the forgiveness of sins received through repentance and baptism into Christ; Colossians 2:13–17, the record of debt nailed to the cross and the shadows of the Law fulfilled in Christ; Hebrews 8:6–13, the new and better covenant that makes the first one obsolete.