

ENGAGE

- As you approach the text you may find these questions and thoughts to be helpful?
 - Who do they see themselves as in the story?
 - The Searchers – Pharisees, Teachers and crowd who came
 - The Sick – Paralyzed and needing help?
 - The Savior – imaging Jesus to pray for healing and minister to people?
 - The Support – Those who would help a friend come to Jesus?

EXAMINE

I don't like confrontations. I like people to like me, probably too much, a sign of my own insecurity. But Jesus wasn't afraid of confrontation when it furthered his goals. It looks to me like he purposely provoked a controversy in Peter's house. Jesus had been traveling with his disciples throughout Galilee (and perhaps some of Judea). Now he was back at "his own town" (Matthew 9:1) and "at home" (Mark 2:1), probably at Peter's house that he had adopted as his Galilee headquarters.

Pharisees and Teachers of the Law (5:17a)

On this particular occasion Jesus was teaching indoors -- perhaps it was winter and stormy outside. Peter's house was filled to the bursting point. Some may have been standing, but one group was sitting -- "Pharisees and teachers of the law, who had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem, were sitting there" (5:17). This is the first time that Luke tells us about these religious leaders at Jesus' meetings. With his spectacular healings, the testimony of a healed leper, and preaching trips throughout the region, Jesus is definitely on the religious leaders' "radar screen." They have gathered, perhaps by common consent, to hear him, with representatives all the way from Jerusalem, the center of Judaism. (See my short dissertation on "[Religious Leaders in Jesus' Day](http://www.jesuswalk.com/lessons/religious-leaders.htm)"<http://www.jesuswalk.com/lessons/religious-leaders.htm> which explains the differences between these leaders.)

The healing of the paralyzed man is the first of several incidents Luke places in a row that indicate growing conflict with the religious establishment:

- When he heals a paralytic, they question Jesus authority to forgive sins (5:17-26)
- When he eats at a tax collector's home, they question Jesus' choice of friends (5:27-32)
- Jesus compares their legalistic religion to brittle old wineskins that can't hold the frothy new wine (5:33-39)
- Finding fault with his disciples and his healing, they accuse Jesus of Sabbath breaking (6:1-11)

At the end of this string of confrontations we read, "They were furious and began to discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus" (6:11). The plots continue throughout the next months and years finally culminate in Jesus' arrest and crucifixion. But Jesus knows he must not back down just because he is challenged. His mission demands confrontation with blindness so the truth can be seen with vividness.

Sources

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Power to Heal (5:17b)

Now we see an interesting phrase: "And the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick" (5:17b). Does this mean that the power of God was NOT always with him to heal? No, not at all. It's just another in a series of mentions Luke makes of the power of the Holy Spirit that is upon Jesus for ministry:

- "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan...." (4:1)
- "Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit...." (4:14)
- "The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to...." (4:18)
- "With authority and power he gives orders to evil spirits and they come out" (4:36)
- "The people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all." (6:19)
- "Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me." (8:46)
- "He gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases...." (9:1)

The power of God is ALWAYS present with Jesus to heal the sick, even today!

Lowering the Paralytic into the House (5:18-19)

Now we see an amazing tale unfold. Jesus is inside Peter's house teaching, the scribes and Pharisees listening intently to try to figure him out. He is certainly powerful in his teaching, they have to acknowledge. They are viewing him as a scribe or teacher of a different magnitude than themselves, and the comparison with their own teaching ability is embarrassing.

Outside, Mark tells us that four men (Mark 2:3) are carrying their paralyzed friend so he can be healed by Jesus. He's being carried on some kind of a litter, a bed attached to a wooden frame. The Greek word for "bed" is *kline*, " 'bed, couch' a place for those who are resting... 'dining couch'... 'pallet stretcher' on which a sick man was carried." [1]

The men approach Peter's house where Jesus is reported to be, but people are jammed tightly together around the door, and inside it is even worse. The men look at one another. What shall we do? One points to the roof. Above the living quarters, houses in Palestine typically had a flat roof surrounded by a low three foot wall to keep people from falling off. On the outside of the house is a stairway up to the roof. [2] Bypassing the crowd, the men begin to carry their sick friend up the stairway. The men at the bottom hold their end high; those in front hold the stretcher low so the man won't tumble off. Finally they reach the top. Nobody is watching them. All ears are straining to hear what Jesus is saying inside.

But on the roof the men set their paralyzed friend down and start to work. Roofs were supported by one or more beams, usually not much more than 1.8 meters (6 feet) above the floor below, bearing on posts for the longer spans. Then smaller timbers as joists were spaced out and covered in turn with brushwood. The final covering was made of mud mixed with chopped straw, which was then beaten and rolled. To this day, similar houses keep a cylindrical stone roller about 60 cm (2 feet) long on the rooftop, used to roll the mud into greater solidity every year when the first rains come. [3] Luke speaks of roof tiles (Greek *keramos*) that were in use in Palestine by this date. [4]

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I imagine the men removing the tiles and stacking them to one side. Then they begin to pry up the mud and wattle until they can see light below. By this time the work of the men above is becoming obvious to the crowded listeners below. Pieces of dried mud are falling on those under the widening hole. Peter looks up as his roof is destroyed, a frustrated expression on his face, but Jesus the Carpenter assures him and continues teaching. When a large hole has been opened, the men above improvise ropes and begin to lower the pallet carrying a VERY trusting paralyzed man. Down they lower it into the center of the room. In spite of the press of people, space is made for the pallet until it rests on the floor.

Everyone is hushed, waiting to see what happens.

Faith for Healing (5:20a)

Jesus looks up at the faces of the four men peering down from the hole above, and then at the long-suffering paralytic before him. The Gospel writers then record an interesting statement: "When Jesus saw their faith, he said...." Whose faith? Certainly the faith of the men who had brought their friend and gone to great trouble to place him directly before Jesus. If they didn't believe their friend would be healed, they never would have carried out this desperate act. They would have turned around and carried him home with the promise, "We'll try again soon." Yes, those faces looking down do believe, and believe very greatly in the Master's power. And then there is the paralyzed man himself. Unless he is completely without any motor control whatsoever, he would have protested this craziness to his friends and insisted they take him home to avoid embarrassment -- unless he, too, believes.

Faith -- someone's faith -- is one important ingredient in healing. Lack of faith in Jesus' hometown of Nazareth resulted in few healings (Matthew 13:58; Mark 6:5-6). We see a similar phrase in Acts 14:9 regarding a crippled man in Lystra. "He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed and called out, 'Stand up on your feet!' At that, the man jumped up and began to walk." Sometimes, however, it is the healer's faith that is lacking (Matthew 17:20). In case of the paralytic man let down into Peter's house while Jesus is teaching, both the friends and the paralytic himself seem to have faith for healing.

Forgiving Sins (5:20b-24)

"When Jesus saw their faith, he said, 'Friend, your sins are forgiven' " (5:20).

Jesus knows his audience. He is aware that the scribes and Pharisees believe that only God himself can forgive sins. Of course, Nathan the prophet had pronounced the Lord's forgiveness when David had confessed his sin (2 Samuel 12:13), but only God can actually forgive sin. What's more, the Pharisees believe that prophecy has effectually ceased.[5] Jesus knows that if he forgives the paralytic his sins, it would cause a great stir. I can't escape the impression that Jesus deliberately provokes the scribes and Pharisees. Why?

Sure enough, "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?' (5:21) It isn't spoken out loud but spoken in the mind. The verb is *dialogizomai*, "consider, ponder, reason something in one's own mind." [6] While *dialogizomai* can also indicate a verbal argument, we know this was unspoken, since in the next sentence Jesus says, "Why are you thinking these things in your hearts...." He can read their faces and body language plainly enough to see that they are upset with his declaration -- as he knew they would be. He

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knows they consider his words blasphemy, Greek *blasphemia*, any "violation of the power and majesty of God"[7]

Now he increases their discomfort with a choice: "Which is easier? To say:

- "Your sins are forgiven" OR
- "Get up and walk"

Then he tells the man to get up, healing him. The clear take away lesson is that Jesus has the authority to forgive sins AND heal the sick. Anyone can say, "Your sins are forgiven." Those are easy words to say, and who can tell whether or not the sins really HAVE been forgiven. But Jesus both pronounces forgiveness and then heals. Neither is humanly possible. Speaking healing words, too, is easy, but it's pretty easy to tell whether the person is healed or not, whether the words are authoritative or just wind. Therefore, Jesus reasons out loud, if God honors his declaration of healing that is an indication that God also honors Jesus' declaration of forgiveness, as well. The scribes and Pharisees must really be twitching by now! :-)

Luke 5:24 is the first instance where Jesus begins to fill the term "Son of Man" with his own meaning: " 'But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins....' He said to the paralyzed man, 'I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.' " The Son of Man has authority from God both to heal and to forgive sins. (See my short essay, "[The Son of Man](http://www.jesuswalk.com/lessons/son-of-man.htm)" for more information. <http://www.jesuswalk.com/lessons/son-of-man.htm>)

Healing Sickness (5:24-26)

Jesus, who often lays his healing hands on each sufferer, in this case speaks a word of command to the paralyzed man, a command that can only be obeyed in faith: "Get up, take your mat, and go home." Jesus' disciples Peter and John had listened well, for at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple they spoke similar words to a crippled man: "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk!" (Acts 3:6) You hear the words echoed by Paul to a crippled man at Lystra, "Stand up on your feet!" (Acts 14:10) In each of these instances the result is the same. As the paralyzed or crippled man begins to obey he is instantly healed and is able to obey. Some, perhaps, respond best to a ministry of the laying on of hands and prayer. Others to a command of faith. Jesus knew best how to deal with the people the Father sent him to minister to.

The result of this strange encounter in Peter's house with the new skylight was both wonder and praise: "Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, 'We have seen remarkable things today.' " (5:26)

Lessons for Disciples

As Jesus ministers in his living room, Peter watches, wonders, and learns. What lessons are intended for us disciples to grasp from this day's events?

1. The importance of persistent, unstoppable faith in receiving from Jesus.
2. Jesus' authority on earth of forgive sins.
3. Jesus' authority to heal the paralyzed.

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4. Fearlessness before the religious authorities.
5. A willingness to stretch people's understanding, even at the risk of offense.

The lame man obeys Jesus, and as he stands up there was a spontaneous "Ahhh" that circulates over the crowded room as a wave radiating out from the center. A moment before the man is paralyzed; now he is standing. The room is once more as the man gathers up his stretcher, poles sticking out at the ends. He slips off the ropes dangling from the ceiling, puts the stretcher under his arms, and begins to make his way through the crowd which parts spontaneously to let him through. A few probably reach out to touch him as he passes by into the courtyard.

Peter and the disciples learn much. Perhaps the lame man learn the most of all. He learns he can put his trust in Jesus, permanently, persistently. That in Jesus, despite r how paralyzed he may be physically -- or emotionally or spiritually, for that matter -- no matter how paralyzed he is, when Jesus tells him he can walk, he is now able. The man walks free this day and life changes forever, due to four good friends and one Best Friend, Jesus.

Questions

1. Why do you think Jesus spoke the extremely controversial words, "Your sins are forgiven." He could have been less offensive to the visiting guests. Why did he choose not to be?
2. What is the connection between sin and sickness in this passage?
3. Which of the two phrases IS easier to say? "Your sins are forgiven!" OR "Get up, take your mat, and go home!"; What point did Jesus want us to draw from this incident?
4. Why did Jesus use the term "Son of Man" rather than "Son of God" or "Messiah"?
5. Whom do you feel most like at present? The paralyzed man or one of the four friends? Why?
6. If forgiveness is people's main need, is it wrong to help them solve other problems as a means to sharing the gospel? Why/why not?
7. How do we determine which methods of evangelism are acceptable? Does the method matter?
8. How can we develop friendships for the purpose of leading others to Christ and yet avoid being manipulative?
9. Why is a proper understanding of who Christ is crucial in evangelism?

Prayer

Lord, sometimes I have felt paralyzed, too, and people have lifted me to you. You have healed me and re-mobilized me with a word. Thank you. Likewise, help me be a friend to others who can't get to you on their own. In your strong name, I pray. Amen.

Sources

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