

A Grievous Problem, A Gracious Provision

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[0:00] Amen. Well, it's good to see you this morning and after my absence last Sunday.

! It's good to be back in the pulpit. But it's also a blessing to have some men who are ready and able to step up. And I thank Shane for preaching for me and Chris for preaching for me Sunday night.

And I know you were blessed by their messages. Good to be back. And so take your Bibles and open them, if you would, to Luke chapter 5. Luke chapter 5.

And I'm going to be reading verses 12 through 26. Luke 5, 12 through 26 is our text for this morning. And it happened when he was in a certain city, and of course this is Jesus in a certain city, that behold, a man who was full of leprosy saw Jesus and he fell on his face and implored him saying, Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.

Then he put out his hand and touched him, saying, I am willing. Be cleansed. Immediately the leprosy left him.

[1:31] And he charged him to tell no one, but go and show yourself to the priest and make an offering for your cleansing as a testimony to them, just as Moses commanded.

However, the report went around concerning him all the more, and great multitudes came together to hear and to be healed by him of their infirmities.

So he himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed. 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. Then, behold, men brought on a bed a man who was paralyzed, whom they sought to bring in and lay before him.

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.

[2:33] When he saw their faith, he said to him, Man, your sins are forgiven you. And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, Who is this who speaks blasphemies?

Who can forgive sins but God alone? But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answered and said to them, Why are you reasoning in your hearts?

Which is easier, to say your sins are forgiven you, or to say, Rise up and walk? 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.

And immediately he rose up before them, took up what he had been lying on, and departed to his own house, glorifying God. And they were all amazed, and they glorified God, and were filled with fear, saying, We have seen strange things today.

Interesting story. Actually, two stories. But they go together. Now, it might be, I think, important for us to know that each of the Gospel writers, that would be Mark, or Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, wrote with differing agendas in mind.

[3:57] Do you know that about the Gospels? They did all write for the same reasons. Now, they told many of the same things, of course. But they wrote for different reasons. And to begin with, each one wrote to different audiences.

We should know that. For example, Matthew wrote his Gospel with a Jewish reader in mind. That's why you read through Matthew, and you have him always, constantly, quoting Old Testament Scripture, and saying that it might be fulfilled.

So he's writing to a Jewish audience primarily. Both Mark and Luke, I think, wrote their Gospels to Gentile readers. And John, I guess you could say, wrote to the world at large.

He wrote to Jews and Gentiles alike. Now, consequently, since they wrote to differing audiences, they also wrote with slightly different purposes.

Or we could say agendas when they wrote. Now, they didn't come up with that themselves necessarily. Of course, it was the Holy Spirit that inspired them to write not only to different audiences, but also to write with differing agendas and purposes.

[5:03] But now, because of that then, perhaps you have noticed in your reading of the Bible, and especially the Gospels, you've noticed that the four Gospels are not just simply carbon copies of one another.

There are differences. And some have even been so bold and yet so wrong as to say that there are differences because there are some mistakes. Some of the Gospel writers just got it wrong.

That's not the case. But there are differences. Now, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, you also have noticed, are very similar, aren't they? Very similar. In fact, in some cases, almost word for word.

That's why we call them the synoptic Gospels, which just simply means seeing through one eye.

But now, John is quite different. I mean, there are a number of elements in the Gospel of John that do not appear in any of the other three Gospels.

And so there are some differences. But the point of all of this is this. The Gospel writers did not always seek to present their accounts in some strict chronological order.

[6:13] And there's no reason to think that they should have because they're writing for different purposes. They were selective in their stories, the stories that they included in their Gospels, and also the stories that they excluded from their Gospel accounts.

And most importantly, they grouped together certain stories in the life of Jesus with this intent. The intent to teach specific truths concerning the Lord Jesus Christ chiefly, but also to teach specific truths concerning the Gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, the way of salvation, to teach the Christian life and Christian living, and on and on I could go.

Now, that is what Luke has done here in our text for this morning. He has grouped two seemingly unrelated stories, two stories, by the way, that happened in two different places at two different times and not necessarily one right after the other.

The chronology may not be the point here, but he has grouped them together for a purpose. And that purpose being to teach us something vital about Jesus Christ.

Now, that's been Luke's intent really from the very beginning. His focus, now all the Gospels are focused on Christ, but Luke is focused on teaching us some very vital things about the Lord Jesus Christ.

[7:55] And that's what he's doing here. There is something here we need to know about Jesus. There is something in these two miracle stories, and Luke is putting them together, something here that we need to learn about, something we need to trust Jesus for.

And most importantly, it is something that meets the most critical need that we all have.

And I'm not talking about physical healing. That's usually the first thing that we think about when we read these two stories. I'm not talking about physical healing here. And so let me just say this right now.

the primary thing the Holy Spirit wants us to get from these two stories in the passage is not Jesus' power to heal, though He has that power.

That's not the first thing He wants us to see, the primary thing He wants us to see. In fact, if that's all you see in these two stories, Jesus' mighty power to heal, if that's all you see, then you've missed it.

[9:06] You have missed it. Now, Jesus does have the authority and power to heal. He certainly does. He did heal the leper.

Instantaneously. Miraculously, of course. Supernaturally. He healed him completely. And He did heal the lame man. Yes, He certainly did.

And this man got up and walked. Not only walked, he also picked up his bed and carried it with him and walked home. Instantaneous. Complete. Healing.

Absolutely. But we must not miss the point here. The most important point. The leper's most critical need was not physical healing.

The lame man's most critical need in his life was not physical healing. And likewise, your and my most critical need is not physical healing.

[10:16] It is forgiveness. forgiveness. Do you understand? That's our most immediate, most critical need is forgiveness.

The forgiveness of sin. And I would be so bold as to say that the heart of the gospel is forgiveness. Forgiveness for sin.

That is the good news, by the way. That Jesus has the authority and power to forgive sin. And that is what this text is about.

These two stories grouped together. That's what it's about. Now, with that in mind, we can learn three important truths about that from these two miracle stories.

The first one I would label this way. A grievous problem. The first truth we need to get here is this.

[11:19] There is a grievous problem. These two miracle stories reveal a grievous problem that is common to both of these guys.

But I would go further by extension to say it is common to every single one of us. In the first story, the leper was overcome by a grievous problem of which his devastating leprosy was just a symbol. And in the second story, the second miracle story, the lame man was overcome, absolutely overcome, by a grievous problem of which his crippling paralysis was just a symptom or a symbol rather.

Not a symptom, a symbol. Their grievous problem was sin. You can't talk about forgiveness without talking about sin. That's the problem. The grievous problem is sin.

Now, don't misunderstand me. I am not saying that their illnesses, the leprosy, the lameness, I'm not saying that these two illnesses for these two guys was a direct result of their sin.

[12:32] I'm not saying that. That's not the point. Now, sometimes it clearly is the direct result of sin. Sometimes it is the natural result of sinful behavior.

Liver disease is sometimes the effect, the result of the sin of alcoholism. There's no question about it. And there are other things that happen as a natural result of sin activity.

Certainly that is the case. Now, that's not the case here in these two stories. But it can be the result of sin. And sometimes illness and even death is a direct result of the judgment of God.

Sometimes it is. Not always. In fact, I might even say seldom it is. But it is. Sometimes. The direct result of the judgment of God. And on the larger scale and the general sense, I would say that all sicknesses and all death are linked to Adam and Eve's sin in the Garden of Eden.

I mean, without the fall there would be no death. There would be no sickness. And so it's indirectly, well, in a sense, directly related to the sin in the Garden of Eden.

[13:44] The sin that's passed on to every one of us. There's death in the world because of sin. There is sickness and illness because of sin. Nevertheless, all sicknesses and death are not a direct result of sin activity.

And so what I mean here is this. Leprosy in the Bible is symbolic of the contamination, the, I would even use the word putrefaction, and consumption and destruction of sin.

Leprosy is a symbol of that in the Bible and I think in this story because sin consumes us. Have you discovered that?

Sin ultimately destroys us. Leprosy is a symbol of that. And just like the leper in our story, the sinner needs what?

Cleansing. Cleansing. Our most critical need. And what about the lame man, the paralytic? Well, his malady is symbolic of the crippling and paralyzing results and effects of sin.

[15:10] Sin cripples us. Sin paralyzes moralizes us so that we cannot do what God has created us to do. It's symbolic of these things.

And by the way, did you know that according to the Old Testament law, both leprosy and lameness excluded one's participation in the worship of God in the temple?

In the Old Testament economy, it did. It excluded them from worship, from the corporate worship. It excluded them from, certainly in the case of the leper, from the fellowship of God's people.

These conditions then were grievous conditions. Leprosy and lameness. They were isolated and separated from the people of God.

And they were isolated and separated from the corporate worship of God. And they were reduced, in most cases, to begging. The life of a beggar.

[16:12] But both of these guys symbolized for us the grievous problem of sin. Let me ask you something. What do you think in our current, the current view of our culture, what do you think is the current view of sin in our culture today?

If you were to define it. What do you think people are thinking about sin today in our culture? I have heard Adrian Rogers say many, many times, he said, in America today, the sin that used to slink

down the back alleys now struts down Main Street.

And we know it's true. in fact, there's hardly a day when we can pick up the paper or read the newspaper or watch the news on TV or listen to it on the radio or even have more immediate confrontations with the world around us.

There's hardly a day that we don't find ourselves absolutely appalled at the brazen commitment of sin in our culture and acceptance of sin in our culture.

it struts down Main Street. And why is that? Well, because we have now effectively eliminated in our culture not just the seriousness of sin, but we have eliminated the reality of sin and certainly we have eliminated or absolutely defied any consequence of sin in our culture.

[17 : 54] And to some measure, we are affected by that, even God's people. We have succumbed to some of that at least by degree.

Shame on us. Well, that's just the way it is today. We have redefined sin. We have explained it away. We have justified it. We have even glorified it in our culture.

And we have all but completely eliminated or silenced the preaching of it in many churches today. in our politically correct society, the only sin today is to call sin, sin.

And that's where we've come. Well, let me ask you this. Think about this question very seriously. is there a gospel without sin?

Do we have a gospel if there is no such thing as sin? Do we? I mean, can we proclaim the good news of the cross without also preaching the sinfulness of man?

[19 : 12] Can we? sinfulness of sin? No. And I would go a step further and say, what attractiveness does the cross even possess to sinners if sinners don't know they are sinners?

I like what John Piper said, oh, the perils of not knowing our sin. Think about that.

He went on to say, there is a great sadness that comes from not being saddened by knowing our sin. He said, there is a great self-destruction that comes from not experiencing the self- devastation of knowing our sin.

There is an eternal loss that comes from not losing our pride in the knowledge of our sin. If there is any hope, any faith, any joy and peace and love, it will come from knowing our sin.

So, get to know your sin. You say, well, I already know that. Do you? Do we? We get on our knees sometimes and we pray and we ask God to forgive us of our sins?

[20 : 40] Have you ever suddenly been overwhelmed with the thought that I don't really know my sin? I mean, to know it in the sense that I know the fullness of it and the absolute utter wickedness of it.

And it doesn't make any difference what that sin is, by the way. Do we really know our sin? We need to get to know our sin.

And I would say that all the glorious benefits of knowing Christ are predicated upon one knowing the full reality of his or her sin. sin is moral mutiny against God.

In the words of the great Puritan John Bunyan, he said, sin is, now listen to this, sin is to dare God's justice. It is to rape His mercy.

It is to jeer at His patience. It is to slight His power. And it is to have contempt for His love. Well, I don't think it could define sin any better than that.

[21 : 52] Do you know sin in that way? It's a grievous problem. And by the way, it is the fact of sinfulness more than just the presence of sinful activity that we need to acknowledge.

Right? Because we can say, well, yes, I have sinned, but I'm not really a sinner. It's the fact of sin. They say that more people drown in nine feet of water than in ninety feet of water.

And likewise, it is not the amount of sinfulness or sin activity. It's not the amount of sin, but it is the fact of sin that condemns us.

Now, this is not the good part of the story, but this is a necessary part of it. And it's a truth that we must get from this text.

and in many other places of the Bible. It is a grievous problem. Sin is a grievous problem. That must have an answer. And so, in stark contrast to this first truth, the second truth should thrill us.

[23 : 04] The second truth I would label this way. A gracious provision. You see, a grievous problem is answered with a gracious provision.

Or put it this way, sin is answered with what? Forgiveness. Forgiveness. And I said at the beginning, the heart of the gospel is the forgiveness of sin.

And that is what Luke wants us to convey through these two miracle stories. Now, let me explain what I mean. And let Scripture explain it. Look at verse 12. And it happened when he was in a certain city that behold, a man who was full of leprosy saw Jesus.

He saw him. And he fell on his face and implored him, saying, Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean. Now, note that word clean.

Now, notice what Jesus does. Then he put out his hand and did the unthinkable. What did he do? He touched him.

[24 : 25] He touched him. Listen, on that day, you didn't touch lepers. You just don't do that. And not only did you risk contracting the disease, the dreaded disease yourself.

That was the thinking of the day. But more importantly, you also became unclean yourself. Whether or not you contracted the disease, you became unclean.

And by the way, by law, you were not to come within six feet of a leper. And that distance was to be adjusted to 150 feet if you were downwind of a leper.

they took this pretty seriously. Now, we've learned some things about leprosy in our day, of course. But this was the thinking of the day, and this was the law of the day.

But what did Jesus do? He touched him. He touched him. He reached out with his hands, and he touched this leper. And he said to him, look at verse 13, I am willing, be cleansed.

[25 : 31] Now, note that word cleansed again. And what happened? Immediately, the leprosy left him. He was healed. This man, the Bible says, Luke, the physician says, and he put it in very specific terms, very medical terms, he said that this man was full of leprosy.

That means from his head to his feet. He was covered with it. Serious condition. And Jesus touched him, and he completely healed him.

A miracle. Right? No question about it. But that's only a part of it. And relatively speaking, a small part.

This man's biggest need was to be restored to God in fellowship with God. Communion with God, restored to a place of worship with God in the temple.

That was his greatest need. And also to be restored with fellowship to God's people. His biggest need was not physical, it was spiritual, and according to the law, he had to be declared clean by the priest.

[26 : 42] This was a spiritual thing, and it foreshadowed, by the way, a spiritual thing for us. And so the Bible goes on to say, and he charged him, Jesus charged him to tell no one, but go and show yourself to the priest and make an offering for your cleansing.

There's the word again. As a testimony to them, just as Moses commanded. That was the law of the day. That was certainly the Old Testament covenant. The Old covenant was still in effect in this day, including the priesthood, also the ceremonial laws for cleansing.

That was God's provision for sin prior to the cross. But now we're on the other side of the cross, and so all of that has been replaced by the new covenant in Christ's blood shed upon the cross, and so the whole point is what?

Cleansing. Spiritual cleansing. Or forgiveness. Forgiveness. What about the second miracle? The lame man.

Well, when this lame man is brought to Jesus, what is the first thing out of Jesus' mouth? Man, your sins are forgiven.

[27 : 57] the first thing he said. Now, why did he say that? Did the man ask for that? Well, if he did, it's not recorded in Scripture, and I think it would be there. Did the guys who brought him ask of this for their friend?

No? No indication of that? So, here's what is going on. The Bible is saying to us, as important as the physical needs of these two guys were.

There was no deeper need in their life than that their sins be forgiven. That's what it's saying about these two guys, and that's what it is saying about us.

There's no deeper need than that. And that's why Luke speaks of cleansing and forgiving in these two miracle stories in the Bible.

And this is what Luke wants us to get. That Jesus alone has the authority and the power to forgive sins.

[29 : 14] That's his gracious provision. Jesus can do what no priest could do. he could he could he could examine him and verify that he's free of leprosy, but he could not heal it.

And no priest could forgive him of his sins. And Jesus can do all of that. He can heal and forgive sins. Now notice how this plays out in verse 20. When he saw their faith, he said to him, man, your sins are forgiven.

And then there was the fly and the ointment, of course, and the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, who is this who speaks blasphemies? And then they just simply stumbled over the right answer.

They didn't see it. They asked, who can forgive sins but God alone? Exactly! Exactly! Who can but God?

And he was standing right there in front of them and they didn't see him. Nor would they acknowledge their sinfulness. But when Jesus, verse 22, perceived their thoughts, he answered and said to them, why are you reasoning in your hearts?

[30:31] Which is easier? To say, your sins are forgiven you? Or to say, rise up and walk? And then he doesn't give them a time to answer, does he?

Well, what about you? How would you answer that question? Well, you would say, like I would say, well, you know, for my part, neither one is easier.

That's what we ought to be thinking. Neither one. I can't heal a leper or a lame man, and I certainly cannot forgive anyone, any person's sins before God.

I can't do that. Exactly. That's the whole point. Who can? Jesus can.

Jesus can. And in the next few verses, Jesus is effectively saying, essentially saying, do you want to know, do you want proof that I have the power and authority to forgive people of their sins?

[31:41] Then watch this. Man, get up and walk. That's what he's doing. And the way Luke describes this is so visual.

Immediately, no delay, no time, no time for recovery, no need for that. Immediately, he rose up before them.

Everybody could see. They didn't carry him home and then later report that, hey, it did come true. He didn't gradually just kind of get his legs back and you know, so forth.

Didn't have any recovery time. He immediately rose up before them, took up his bed because Jesus told him to, took up what he was lying on and he departed carrying his bed and he went home glorifying God.

Amazing. Amazing. And that's just exactly how the people there responded. in amazement seized them all and they glorified God and were filled with awe saying, we have seen extraordinary things today.

[32:50] And indeed they did. And I would say to you that God's gracious forgiveness is an extraordinary thing.

that he would forgive me is amazing. That he would forgive you is an extraordinary thing.

So, a grievous problem, sin. And it's answered with a gracious provision, forgiveness.

that is what we need. And then comes the truth we've all been waiting for, hoping for. Though you may not have thought of it yet, as soon as I mention it, you're going to say, yes, that is what I'm looking for.

And I would label it this way, a glorious promise. A glorious promise. You see, someone here today might say, that's exactly what I need.

[34:10] Forgiveness. Preacher, I need forgiveness. But, will he? Will he?

What did the leper say? Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.

And what did Jesus say? I'm willing. Be cleansed. What a promise.

You see, this man came to Jesus. Jesus alone. For his cleansing. Not to anyone else.

It was Jesus. We're to understand from the narration that this man knew that Jesus was his only hope.

[35:21] And so, what did he do? He humbled himself. humbled himself before Jesus. He acknowledged his true need.

Didn't hold that back. Didn't hide that. Didn't explain it away. He was a leper and he knew he was a leper. There's no sense lying about it. No sense trying to cover it up and hide it.

He acknowledged it before Jesus and Jesus said, be cleansed. Be cleansed. And what about the lame man? The Bible says in verse 20, when Jesus saw their what?

Faith? Of course, now Jesus sees the reality of faith in the heart. But Jesus also sees the fruit, the fruit of genuine faith.

The outward expression of genuine faith. The lame man knew that Jesus was the only hope, his only hope. How do we know that? I mean, look at the great lengths he went to get to him.

[36:32] Jesus was his only hope. And so desperate was he to get to Jesus that he and his buddies took drastic measures.

I mean, there's no other way to read it. This is drastic. You don't just go up on the top of a house and tear open the roof. You just don't do that. They took drastic measures.

And what did Jesus say? Man, your sins are forgiven you. You see, listen, dear people. Jesus is the only one who can forgive sins.

sins. But some of you might be thinking, preacher, you just don't know what I've done. I guarantee you there's someone here this morning thinking right now, I've already done some things that are so filthy, so sinful, even a believer, even a blood-bought child of God here this morning.

Maybe thinking, right, I've crossed the line. There's no forgiveness for me. But dear, dear soul, have you not been paying attention to this story?

[38:16] Here's a leper. You couldn't get any worse than that. And there could be nothing in this world in the way of sicknesses and disease that is more symbolic of utter sinfulness.

To be consumed by it. And this man was a leper from head to foot. Here is a leper a putrefying leper, an outcast.

And here in our story is a lame man. The epitome of what sin does to us, it cripples us. It's devastating.

So here's a leper and here's a lame man. And to the leper, Jesus touched him and cleansed him.

And to the lame man, he said, I forgive you. Your sins are forgiven. Rise up and walk. walk. You see, no one has ever sinned beyond the love of God.

[39:41] No one has. I don't care what it is. don't avoid God.

Don't hide from God. Don't hesitate to go to prayer before God because you think your sin is so heinous, so ugly, filthy, that you can't go to God.

No one has ever sinned beyond the love of God. No sin, no sin, no matter what it is, puts you beyond the reach of God's forgiveness through Christ.

That is a glorious promise.