

# JESUS SAW THEIR FAITH

Luke 5:12-26

Key Verse 5:20, “When Jesus saw their faith, he said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven.”

I praise and give thanks to God for blessing abundantly our Easter Conference last weekend. The five young messengers delivered powerful messages about the death and resurrection of Jesus. The nine beautiful life testimonies moved our hearts. We had meaningful meditation and conversation about the forgiveness of Jesus through forty-eight Group Bible studies. We had joyful fellowship for our first in-person conference since the start of the pandemic. After the conference, more than 20 members tested positive for Covid 19. Thankfully, everyone is recovering well. One of them said that to have the conference in person was definitely worth it. We pray for God’s healing and protection for each of them, and all of us, especially for our senior members.

Today’s passage contains two healing stories of Jesus: one is about the healing of a man covered with leprosy and the other is about the healing of a paralyzed man. Both came to Jesus by faith and their faith was active. Jesus was pleased with their actions of faith and forgave them and healed them immediately. All of us need the forgiveness and healing of Jesus. I pray that we can be encouraged to come to Jesus by faith through today’s message.

## I. “I am willing. Be clean!” (12-16)

Verse 12a says, “While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy.” The New American Standard Bible (NASB), adds the word ‘behold’ as follows, “While he was in one of the cities, behold, there was a man covered with leprosy.” The word ‘behold’ in Greek ‘ἰδοὺ /idou/’ is used 57 times in Luke’s Gospel to draw readers’ attention to some amazing events of Jesus’ ministry. Then, why is this story so amazing that we need to pay careful attention to it? It was because a man covered with leprosy came to Jesus by faith.

The author Luke was a medical doctor; thus, he described the physical condition of the man more meticulously than the other gospel authors, saying that the man was covered with leprosy. Do you know what kind of disease is leprosy? In our modern society, leprosy, also known as Hansen’s disease, is an infection caused by a bacteria that affects the nerves, skin, eyes, lining of the nose, and if it gets worse, it can cause crippling of hands and feet, paralysis, and blindness. It is not highly contagious as some people fear.<sup>1</sup> According to the statistics of the World Health Organization, there were over 127,000 new leprosy cases detected globally in 2020.<sup>2</sup> In the United States, there are just 150 to 250 cases diagnosed annually.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/leprosy/index.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/leprosy>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2019/02/21/health/leprosy-cases-study/index.html>

Bible scholars point out that leprosy in the Bible refers to a variety of skin disorders from psoriasis to true leprosy. However, the law of Moses took skin diseases very seriously. According to Leviticus chapter 13, those who had a skin disease had to wear torn clothes, let the hair of their head be disheveled, cover their upper lip and cry out, “Unclean! Unclean!” (Lev 13:45) Furthermore, they were expelled from their community and had to live alone outside the camp (Lev 13:46). Everything they touched was contaminated to be unclean and people who contacted them had to undergo the priest’s examination. Why? The main reason comes from the Jewish religious and socio-cultural notion of cleanness and uncleanness. Because God is holy, cleanness was fundamental to the establishing and preservation of holiness in the Israelite community. Cleanness was ritually acceptable to God, whereas uncleanness was unacceptable to God. Leprosy was particularly dangerous as a source of uncleanness. The leprous disease was regarded as a symbol of sin and the judgment of God. Thus, those who had leprosy felt that they were condemned by God because of their sins. They felt rejected by people and God. They lived isolated from society.

It is very painful for us to feel condemned by God and rejected by others. Peter Greave (1910-1977), the author of *The Second Miracle* (1955), was diagnosed with leprosy in India. When he was brought to live on a compound run by a group of Anglican sisters in England, he was half-blind and partially paralyzed. Unable to work, an outcast from society, he turned bitter. The most painful part was a sense of guilt. He planned to escape the compound and thought of suicide. But one day early in the morning, he heard that sisters were praying for him. He felt wanted. He felt graced. That experience changed his life.<sup>4</sup> Lewis Smedes, the author of *Shame and Grace* (2009), wrote, “Guilt was not my problem as I felt it. What I felt most was a glob of unworthiness that I could not tie down to any concrete sins I was guilty of. What I needed more than pardon was a sense that God accepted me, owned me, held me, affirmed me, and would never let go of me even if he was not too much impressed with what he had on his hands.” He identified three common sources of crippling shame: secular culture, graceless religion, and unaccepting parents. Secular culture tells us a person must look good, feel good, and do good. Graceless religion tells us we must follow rules in detail, and failure will bring eternal rejection. Unaccepting parents—“Aren’t you ashamed of yourself!”—convinces us we will never meet their approval.”<sup>5</sup> How often we have been crippled by our secular culture, graceless religion, and unaccepting parents! How much we have felt rejected, isolated, and guilty of sins! It is very painful to see some of us hiding from society, church, and family like those who have leprosy due to the sense of guilt and rejection. What they need is the love of God and God’s people who say to them, “We love you. We accept you. We need you.”

Amazingly, the man covered with leprosy of today’s passage didn’t hide himself, on the contrary, he came to Jesus by faith. When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the ground and begged him, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.” It was not easy at all for him to come to Jesus because it meant that he had to expose his unclean body and shame to Jesus and those who were there. He had to overcome fear of rejection and death because people would stone him to death. Most of all, he had to overcome his sense of guilt and believe that Jesus

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<sup>4</sup> Philip Yancey, *What’s So Amazing About Grace* (1997).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

would accept him. He might wrestle a lot agonizing in his mind whether to go to Jesus or not. But he made a decision of faith! He came to Jesus by faith and begged him humbly saying, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.” His attitude to come to Jesus was very humble. He fell with his face to the ground and begged him. By calling Jesus ‘Lord,’ he believed that Jesus was the Son of God. By saying ‘if you are willing,’ he recognized the sovereignty of Jesus over his life and was ready to accept the will of Jesus whether he would be willing or not. By saying, ‘you can make me clean,’ the man covered with leprosy manifested his full trust and faith in the power of Jesus who could make him clean. “You can make me clean” was his cry of faith with desire to be recovered and accepted by God and his community.

What was the response of Jesus? Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. Why? He could make him clean without touching him. He could say to him, “Wait, stop there. I will make you clean. You don’t need to come closer.” But Jesus knew exactly what he needed. Jesus wanted to heal his wounded heart. Nobody had touched him since he became a leper. His emotion was deeply wounded by the rejection of people and social stigma for a long time. His self-esteem was very low. He felt that nobody including God loved him. But when Jesus reached out his hand and touched him, the man with leprosy felt the forgiving love and acceptance of God. When the hand of Jesus touched him, his wounded heart was healed completely. Sometimes, we don’t need to speak many words to accept a person. Just giving a hug or putting our hand on his or her shoulder could be enough to show the love of God to that person.

Jesus said, “I am willing. Be clean!” And immediately the leprosy left him. Jesus ordered him to go and show himself to the priest and offer the sacrifices so that he could be accepted by his community. Jesus manifested clearly his will saying, “I am willing. Be clean!” Jesus is willing to make us clean. Jesus is willing to forgive our sins and restore our relationship with God. Jesus is willing to recover us holistically—spiritually, physically, emotionally, mentally, and socially. Jesus doesn’t want you to continue to live under self-condemnation, rejection, and isolation. But rather, Jesus wants you to come to him by faith to be touched, forgiven, and healed by the love and power of Jesus. Are you ready to come to Jesus by faith like the man covered with leprosy did?

## II. “Friend, your sins are forgiven” (17-26)

Now let’s see the story of a paralyzed man. One day Jesus was teaching in Capernaum (Mk 2:1) and some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a mat (18a). The author Luke inserted again the word ‘behold’ saying, “And behold, some men were bringing on a bed a man who was paralyzed” (18a, ESV). Really, this is an amazing story of faith. We don’t know who these men were, but they were four men (Mk 2:3) and heroes of faith. How was their faith revealed in this story?

First, they brought their paralyzed friend to Jesus. When they heard about Jesus who had healed people with different kinds of sicknesses, they believed that Jesus could heal their paralyzed friend too. Do you know where faith comes from? Faith comes from hearing the message about Christ (Ro 10:17). When we hear the story of Jesus through sermons or Bible studies, we can have faith in Jesus. But their faith was not theoretical; it was practical. When they had faith in Jesus, they put it into practice by bringing their paralyzed friend to Jesus. Still, it was

not an easy work. They had to talk to him until he was persuaded. If we don't have conviction, we cannot persuade others. These four friends had strong faith in Jesus, so they could persuade their friend to go to Jesus.

Second, they overcame obstacles to come to Jesus. When they came to the place where Jesus was teaching, there were so many people that they could not find a way to get him to Jesus. So, they could have returned home saying, "Let's come back tomorrow" or "Next time." Instead, they thought that there would be no next time for them. They believed that it was the only opportunity for their friend to be healed. Thus, they didn't give up. They tried to find a way. They encouraged each other saying, "We will either find a way or make one." They knelt down and prayed together. Then, the wisdom of God came to them. "Look up at the sky! Yes, the roof!" A peasant house in Jesus' time had a stairway along the outside wall of the house or inside the courtyard that gave access to the roof. Most roofs were flat and covered with pine planks. Reeds or palm leaves were laid over the planks, and the whole roof was covered with clay. A layer of lime made the roof somewhat waterproof. Therefore, it was not a very complicated work to go up on the roof and make a hole. The four men went up on the roof carrying their paralyzed friend on a mat and made an opening by digging through the roof. And they lowered the paralyzed man on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus. "Mission accomplished!" They were genius, creative, and passionate. Their faith and love made it possible to place their paralyzed friend in front of Jesus. Faith is active and not to shrink back. Hebrews 10:38 says, "My righteous one will live by faith. And I take no pleasure in the one who shrinks back."

Obviously, their action of going up on the roof of someone's house and making a hole is illegal, unethical, and disrespectful. Imagine that in the middle of our worship service, suddenly we hear much noise and see a hole on the roof, and later a man coming down from it and laid in front of this podium. How will we feel? Some will be scared thinking of terrorism, others will get angry for the damage of our property, and others will feel offended by their disrespectful action. I acknowledge that we Christians need to be more ethical, respectful, and gentle in this society that is skeptical of Christianity. Our action of faith will not justify our violation of law and social order. However, we need to recognize that this action of faith came from their love of the paralyzed man. Because the four men loved their friend and had compassion on him, they did their best efforts to help their dear friend. If we understand the intention of their hearts behind their actions, we can understand them and support them.

I deeply appreciate the love and faith of our coworkers who did their best efforts to invite their Bible students, family members, and friends to our last Easter conference. In the middle of the pandemic, we could have a wonderful in-person and online conference with around 400 participants. I was so encouraged by many college students who joined the conference from different campuses. I believe that it was possible because of the love and faith of our precious coworkers. I pray that we can continue to help our Bible students with love and faith to come to Jesus so that they can be faithful disciples of Jesus.

What was the response of Jesus to the action of these men? How did Jesus see it? Jesus saw their faith! Jesus didn't see that they were illegal, unethical, or disrespectful. Jesus didn't rebuke them for damaging the roof. Jesus didn't feel unhappy because they interrupted his

teaching. On the contrary, Jesus saw their faith and the center of their hearts. It is very heart-moving to know that Jesus sees our faith rather than other things. How can we please God? Hebrews 11:6 says, "Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." We can please God with faith. And our faith must be active and practical. Our faith must persuade those who do not have faith in Jesus. Our faith must overcome obstacles to please God. Our faith must be alive to bring people to Jesus for salvation. Do you have this faith?

When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven." Why did Jesus forgive his sins before enabling him to walk? The Jewish worldview in Jesus' time did not separate body from spirit. They considered body, mind, and spirit as one. Thus, the sickness of body meant for them the sickness of whole being. And sin was a cause of illness. Therefore, the term 'to save' was often used to mean 'to heal.' The people thought that the man was paralyzed because of his sins. Hence, Jesus forgave his sins first to remove the cause of his illness. All of us are sinners and need the forgiveness of Jesus. Sin can be defined in different ways such as rebellion against God, transgression of the law, breach of the covenant, etc. One essential status of sin is separation from God. It is a broken relationship with God. Therefore, forgiveness means restoration of relationship with God and others through the precious blood of Jesus Christ. Jesus is God Himself, therefore he could declare the forgiveness of sins. When Jesus told the paralyzed man, "Friend, your sins are forgiven," his broken relationship with God and others was restored completely by the power of forgiveness of Jesus Christ. During the last Easter conference, we heard a message about the forgiving power of Jesus on the cross. "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23:34a). Our lives were changed when we heard this powerful word of Jesus on the cross. Jesus continues to offer us the way of forgiveness saying, "Friend, your sins are forgiven." I pray that we can listen to the voice of Jesus who forgives our sins.

When the Pharisees and the teachers of the law heard the declaration of forgiveness of Jesus, they thought that Jesus was speaking blasphemy. Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, "Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? 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." Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? Both are very difficult for us. We don't have power to forgive sins nor enable him to get up and walk. But Jesus, the Son of Man, has authority on earth to forgive sins. Jesus ordered the paralyzed man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." Then, immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. "Praise the Lord Jesus Christ!

The two stories of today's passage teach us how we can receive the forgiveness and healing of Jesus. What is it? We should come to Jesus by faith just like the man with leprosy and the paralyzed man. Jesus will see our faith and forgive us and heal us. Do you believe it? May the grace of forgiveness and healing of Jesus be with us today and throughout our lives! Amen.

