

Sunday, February 26, 2023 | Onward

Week 7 | Luke 5:12-26 | "The First Theological Controversy of Jesus"

On January 1, Pastor Bob kicked off the first sermon series of 2023 entitled "Onward." This series will explore the so-called "firsts" of Jesus' life and how he pressed *onward* into new and unexplored territories. And Jesus' first words tell us that wherever we are and whatever we're doing, we ought to "be about [our] Father's business."

In the second week, we moved from Jesus' *first words* to the *first steps* of his earthly ministry. As we read, God even showed up to mark that magnanimous moment by declaring to all that Jesus was his actual "Son." And just so that Luke's readers do not miss the importance of that declaration, he immediately provides a lineage that proves that Jesus was, in fact, directly descended from God and not only Adam. Through his *mother's* side, Jesus identifies with the *human* race. But through his *Father's* side, Jesus identifies with the *divine* race. And by being the true heir of God, Jesus can transform sons and daughters of Adam into sons and daughters of God.

We discussed Jesus' first recorded run-in with temptation in the third week. And this temptation is a result of Jesus being declared God's Son. A claim of that magnitude had to be real-world tested. And, as we saw, Satan didn't pull any punches. He tempted the Lord to turn stone into bread, to worship him, and to cast himself down from a lofty height. Ultimately, Jesus did not succumb to the Devil. And so, when the Son of God overcame temptation, he made temptation something to be overcome. What does that mean for us? Through the Messiah's victory, we can be victorious over temptation.

In the fourth week, we unpacked Jesus' first sermon. In that message, the Lord laid out his life's purpose: *he is the bringer of "good news."* He came to fulfill God's promises and liberate God's people. And while his words were initially met with overwhelming enthusiasm, the Lord ended up being driven from his hometown and nearly thrown off a cliff. Why? Jesus revealed that the "good news" wasn't only for his friends but also for their enemies, which proved too much for them to swallow. And so, a congregation that had just applauded Jesus nearly killed him. Ultimately, Jesus never did do a great work in his own hometown. And though that is sad, their failings taught us a valuable lesson: **prejudice keeps us from experiencing the wonders of God.** If we think God has only come for "our camp," we can rest assured he will leave us behind and find those who love the stranger as much as the friend.

In the fifth week, we studied Jesus' first few miracles. We saw him not only cast out demons but heal the diseased. And those demonstrations of power further legitimized Jesus' claims and

began establishing his authority in the people's consciousness. But, as Jesus pointed out, he did not come merely to do good works; he was a preacher of the good news. Thus, the Lord's miracles were always subordinate to his message.

Last week, we were introduced to the first disciples of Jesus. Peter, Andrews, James, and John had an interaction with the Lord on the shores of Galilee that forever changed the trajectory of their life. Peter, particularly, was so moved that he ended up leaving the biggest catch of our life behind to follow Jesus. Why? Because he got a glimpse of who the Lord was. And **the greater our knowledge of Jesus, the greater our devotion to Jesus will be.**

---

Today, we'll be exploring the first theological *controversy* of Jesus. And while, technically, he's already had a bit of conflict in Nazareth (cf. Lu. 4:29-30), that was more mob violence than an attack by some organized group. On the other hand, today's passage will explore his first run-in with official representatives from Judaism.

Interestingly, controversy will become a major characteristic of Jesus' ministry moving forward (cf. Lu. 2:34-35). It seems wherever he goes, he'll become a magnet for debate. For instance, though he was a well-known healer, Jesus would often heal people in an unconventional way (cf. Mar. 8:22-26). He will even perform miracles on the *Sabbath* (cf. Lu. 13:14). As we'll soon see, he will *touch* someone with a highly contagious skin disease. But the real disagreement will come when Jesus claims to *forgive* sins. Healing people is one thing, but offering forgiveness too? Who does this Jesus think he is? God?

However, this passage is about more than just controversy; it also illustrates how Jesus mends relationships of *every* kind. Thus, I want you to notice how Jesus heals **two** types of connections:

**i. The pariah is reintegrated into society (5:12-16).**

**READ:** Luke 5:12-16 (ESV)

<sup>12</sup> While he was in one of the cities, there came a man full of leprosy. And when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and begged him, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean." <sup>13</sup> And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I will; be clean." And immediately the leprosy left him. <sup>14</sup> And he charged him to tell no one, but "go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as Moses commanded, for a proof to them." <sup>15</sup> But now even more the report about him

went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities.<sup>16</sup> But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray.

Leprosy today (also called Hansen's disease) isn't necessarily the same disease called "leprosy" in the first century. The term means "scaliness" and could refer to various skin-based diseases such as psoriasis, lupus, favus (*fey-vuhs*), or even ringworm.<sup>1</sup> In fact, Jewish texts identify as many as seventy-two different kinds of leprosy, including blemishes that might appear on clothing (cf. Lev. 13:47-48) or buildings (cf. Lev. 14:34-53).<sup>2</sup>

The effects of leprosy are characterized by three things.

First and foremost, it was an isolating disease.<sup>3</sup> Regardless of the severity, should a person contract *any* form of leprosy, they must be quarantined from their community to prevent it from spreading (cf. Lev. 13:45-46). So much so that they were required to stand at a distance of fifty paces from others.<sup>4</sup> Not only were they required to self-isolate, but they also had to wear unique clothes, leave their hair in disarray, and cry out "Unclean! Unclean!" whenever they were around people.<sup>5</sup> "Lepers were required to make their appearance as repugnant as possible."<sup>6</sup> This may seem cruel, but in a society that had no means of curing such a disease, it was necessary.

Secondly, aside from the impact this disease could have had on the body, leprosy also had severe psychological ramifications.<sup>7</sup> The leprous person would understandably feel ostracized by society. No one would come near them. They would have to sever ties with their family. They would never be touched by another human being again. Or, if they were touched, it was likely by another person who also had leprosy. "The leper was

---

<sup>1</sup> Danker, Frederick William, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Third Edition, (Chicago, IL; The University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 592.

<sup>2</sup> Garland, David E., *Luke*, Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI; Zondervan 2011), p. 238.

<sup>3</sup> Green, Joel B., *The Gospel of Luke*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI; Eerdmans Publishing, 1997), p. 236.

<sup>4</sup> Edwards, James R., *The Gospel According to Luke*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids, MI; Eerdmans Publishing, 2015), p. 160.

<sup>5</sup> Youngblood, Ronald F., *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, New and Enhanced Edition, (Nashville, TN; Thomas Nelson, 2014), p. 684.

<sup>6</sup> Edwards (2015), p. 159.

<sup>7</sup> Morris, Leon, *Luke*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentary, (Downers Grove, IL; InterVarsity Press, 1988), p. 135.

not just ill; he was an outcast.”<sup>8</sup> He was a **pariah**. As such, lepers experienced something akin to a “living death.”<sup>9</sup>

Lastly, it was also a disease that didn't only need healing but also "cleansing," as a person was considered to be ceremonially unclean if they contracted leprosy.<sup>10</sup> It was a **spiritual disease** as well as a physical one. Should they be cured, they'd have to go through a rigorous religious process that involved multiple sacrifices (i.e., two birds and three lambs)<sup>11</sup> and would take upwards of a week or more to complete. As such, people were just as afraid of becoming spiritually defiled should they come in contact with a leprous person as they were about contracting the disease.

So, in light of all that, imagine how shocking it was for Jesus **to touch** him. Today, we know how powerful touch can be.<sup>12</sup> Skin-to-skin contact in the first few moments after birth regulates a baby's body temperature, assists in the development of the neurological function, and even helps to improve weight gain for both premature and full-term babies.<sup>13</sup> In fact, we know that children who aren't given the proper loving care exhibit “behavioral, emotional and social problems as they grow up.”<sup>14</sup> Even worse, “Babies who are not held, nuzzled, and hugged enough can stop growing, and if the situation lasts long enough, even die.”<sup>15</sup>

But the benefits of touch are not just for children; adults need it too. “The right kind [of touch] can lower blood pressure, heart rate, and cortisol levels, stimulate the hippocampus (an area of the brain that is central to memory), and drive the release of a host of hormones and

---

<sup>8</sup> Wilcock, Michael, *The Message of Luke*, The Bible Speaks Today, (Downers Grove, IL; InterVarsity Press, 1979), p. 52.

<sup>9</sup> Bock, Darrell L., *Luke 1:1-9:50*, The Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI; Baker Academic, 1994), p. 473.

<sup>10</sup> Morris (1988), p. 135.

<sup>11</sup> Edwards (2015), p. 161.

<sup>12</sup> Carey, Benedict, “Evidence That Little Touches Do Mean So Much,” February 22, 2010, *The New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/23/health/23mind.html?scp=3&sq=touch&st=cse>, [accessed, February 23, 2023].

<sup>13</sup> Greicius, Julie, “The benefits of touch for babies, parents,” September 22, 2013, *Stanford Medicine*, <https://med.stanford.edu/news/all-news/2013/09/the-benefits-of-touch-for-babies-parents.html>, [accessed February 23, 2023].

<sup>14</sup> Harmon, Katherine, “How Important Is Physical Contact with Your Infant?” May 6, 2010, *Scientific America*, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/infant-touch/>, [accessed, February 23, 2023].

<sup>15</sup> Szalavitz, Maia, “Touching Empathy: Lack of physical affection can actually kill babies,” March 1, 2010, *Psychology Today*, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/born-love/201003/touching-empathy>, [accessed, February 23, 2023].

neuropeptides that have been linked to positive and uplifting emotions. The physical effects of touch are far-reaching.”<sup>16</sup>

More than any other gospel writer, Luke mentions how Jesus often employed touch when healing (cf. Lu. 7:14; 13:13; 18:15; 22:51).<sup>17</sup> And we know from Mark's parallel that Jesus had compassion at this moment (cf. Mar. 1:41). His touch was motivated by love.

Admittedly, we're not told how long this man had been a leper, but, as COVID proved, even a little bit of isolation is almost unbearable. And considering he was “full of leprosy,” we can safely assume he had this condition for some time.<sup>18</sup> And so, because he had been in this state for so long, we can see now why Jesus touched him. We know that he didn't need to touch someone to heal. He performed many miracles without physical touch (cf. Matt. 5:5-13; Mar. 5:21-34). **But the Lord touched the Leper because he wanted to heal more than just his physical ailments; Jesus also wanted to heal the emotional, psychological, and spiritual aspects of that disease.** Consequently, after Jesus' healing touch, this man could *reintegrate* into society again.<sup>19</sup> Jesus even tells the man to show himself to the local priest and offer up the required sacrifices (vs. 14), not because he needed further cleansing but because this would be how he could get a clean bill of health. The Lord wanted him to get a doctor's note. Jesus wanted to cleanse him from leprosy and reunite him with his friends, family, and neighbors. So, rather than Jesus being defiled by the Leper, the Leper is infected by Jesus.<sup>20</sup> “A reverse contagion has taken place....”<sup>21</sup>

When Jesus is invited into a problem, the pariah, the banished, and the outcast are welcomed home again. And we should never doubt the Lord's willingness to help; he is always willing (vs. 13). He does not lack capacity or compassion (cf. 2 Pet. 3:9). But are we, like the Leper, willing to invite him into our problem? Jesus is ready to help. Are we prepared to accept his help? Or, are we, like Jesus, willing to care more about the spiritual need of the “leper” than how they might “contaminate” us? The sin-sick need the healing touch of Jesus, but sometimes their sin is such a deterrent to us that we are unwilling to approach them with the good news.<sup>22</sup>

## ii. **The paralyzed is reconciled to God (5:17-26).**

---

<sup>16</sup> Konnikova, Maria, “The Power of Touch,” March 4, 2015, *The New Yorker*, <https://www.newyorker.com/science/maria-konnikova/power-touch>, [accessed February 23, 2023].

<sup>17</sup> Bock (1994), p. 473.

<sup>18</sup> Edwards (2015), p. 160.

<sup>19</sup> Garland (2011), p. 238.

<sup>20</sup> Wright, N.T., *Luke For Everyone*, (Louisville, KY; Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), p. 57.

<sup>21</sup> Edwards (2015), p. 160.

<sup>22</sup> Garland (2011), p. 245.

**READ:** Luke 5:17-26 (ESV)

<sup>17</sup> On one of those days, as he was teaching, **Pharisees** and **teachers** of the law were sitting there, who had come from **every** village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was with him to heal. <sup>18</sup> And behold, some men were bringing on a bed a man who was **paralyzed**, and they were seeking to bring him in and lay him before Jesus, <sup>19</sup> but finding no way to bring him in, because of the crowd, they **went up on the roof** and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the midst before Jesus. <sup>20</sup> And when he saw **their faith**, he said, “Man, your **sins** are **forgiven** you.”

<sup>21</sup> And the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, saying, “Who is this who speaks **blasphemies**? Who can forgive sins but God alone?” <sup>22</sup> When Jesus perceived their **thoughts**, he answered them, “Why do you question in your hearts? <sup>23</sup> Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Rise and walk’? <sup>24</sup> But that you may **know** that the Son of Man has **authority** on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the man who was paralyzed—“I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go home.” <sup>25</sup> And immediately he rose up before them and picked up what he had been lying on and went home, **glorifying** God. <sup>26</sup> And amazement seized them all, and they **glorified** God and were filled with awe, saying, “We have seen **extraordinary** things today.”

We know from parallel accounts Jesus is in his home base of Capernaum (cf. Mar. 2:1). And, again, Jesus has attracted a crowd through his teaching and healing. The difference here is the presence of the Pharisees and “teachers of the law,” later called “scribes” (vs. 21).<sup>23</sup> These were well-educated, non-priestly “laypeople” who were the powerful minority in Jesus’ day and vehemently opposed Hellenization.<sup>24</sup> They were legalists--i.e., strict adherence to the Law--to their core. And according to one first-century historian, they numbered around 6,000<sup>25</sup> which would’ve been little more than 1 percent of the population.<sup>26</sup> Thus, with their arrival, the official representatives of organized Judaism were finally starting to take notice of Jesus.

Anyways, Luke draws our attention outside Jesus’ dwelling. Apparently, a group of friends came carrying a man on a stretcher. He was paralyzed and so could not come without some help. But, upon getting to Jesus’ home, the band of friends could not get in. There were too many people. And so, not willing to give up so easily, they climb on the roof (*This was not as difficult as it*

---

<sup>23</sup> Bock (1994), p. 478.

<sup>24</sup> Garland (2011), p. 241.

<sup>25</sup> Morris (1988), p. 137.

<sup>26</sup> Edwards (2015), p. 163.

*might first appear to be as most first-century homes had stairs leading to the roof.), dismantle the ceiling (This would be more difficult considering the roof would've been made of hardened clay supported by wooden beams that had a thick lining of matted reed.<sup>27</sup>), and lowered their friend down through the roof, placing him right before Jesus. All in all, whatever will happen next, these friends of the paralyzed man went to great lengths to bring their friend to Jesus. Would that we were so determined.*

What is curious is that Luke doesn't mention a singular faith, as with the Leper's willingness, but multiple faiths. He says that Jesus saw "*their* faith," referring to the whole group.<sup>28</sup> The first example of faith in Luke's account illustrates how those with faith are determined, allowing nothing to stand in their way.<sup>29</sup> Great faith spurs extraordinary measures. Doubtless, this faith was in Jesus' ability to heal the man of his paralysis. But Jesus will demonstrate that their trust in him will give them more than they bargained for. He can and will heal the man of his ailment but also cure him from a far worse disability: sin. This is why Jesus says, "[Man, your sins are forgiven you.](#)"

One might be tempted to think the man's paralysis resulted from some sin. Jews then believed this (cf. Jhn. 9:1-2; 34).<sup>30</sup> But as John 9 shows, we cannot always make that assumption.<sup>31</sup> Sometimes we're the creators of our own disabilities, but sometimes we bare the results of living in a fallen world. Whatever the cause, the result is the same: *this man's sins were forgiven. **Jesus came to forgive sins, both self-inflicted and inherited.***

The theologians in the group—i.e., the Pharisees and scribes—immediately take note of Jesus' words. And though they don't speak, Jesus hears the thoughts of their heart. They incorrectly ascribe Jesus' words as blasphemous and correctly assign God the ability to forgive sins. The problem was that it would not be blasphemous for God to claim the power to forgive sins. And this is why it was not sinful for Jesus to claim the ability to forgive sins. Jesus was claiming to be God.

And with this claim, the Lord intentionally introduces a theological conundrum: anyone who meets Jesus must wrestle with who Jesus claims to be.<sup>32</sup> C.S. Lewis famously put this in terms of a "trilemma" where Jesus was either a lunatic, liar, or Lord. And Jesus is starting to show that he

---

<sup>27</sup> Garland (2011), p. 242.

<sup>28</sup> Morris (1988), p. 137

<sup>29</sup> Edwards (2015), p. 165.

<sup>30</sup> Garland (2011), p. 242.

<sup>31</sup> Bock (1994), p. 482.

<sup>32</sup> Bock (1994), p. 484.

is more than he is perceived to be: he is more than a miracle worker, he is not crazy, and he is undoubtedly not a liar (Could a crazy person or a liar do such miracles?), Jesus is God.

Jesus even brings out the point explicitly, so the people do not misunderstand. He says, "But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the man who was paralyzed—"I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go home." Jesus' healing of the paralytic proved he had the authority to forgive sins. Had he simply said, "your sins are forgiven," there would've been no proof that Jesus had such power. But *with* the miracle, one cannot doubt that sin was forgiven. If the man's disability proved his sinfulness in the minds of his peers, then reason dictates that should the man be healed of his disability, his sinfulness was also forgiven. **The miracle *verified* a spiritual reality that would've otherwise been impossible to verify.** And with that, the man not only got the use of his legs but was also reconciled to God. In every sense of the word, the once paralyzed man was made whole.

### **So, what's the takeaway?**

**Social and spiritual relationships are repaired through Jesus Christ.**

Through Jesus, the words of the Psalmist are fulfilled.

**READ:** Psalm 103:1-5 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! <sup>2</sup> Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, <sup>3</sup> who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, <sup>4</sup> who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, <sup>5</sup> who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

Though we live in an age of modern medicine where every physical and mental ailment has some procedure, healing ultimately comes from the Lord. And no matter how good doctors and therapists may be, only God can cure spiritual diseases. Both the Leper and the paralytic left that day cleansed from both their physical and spiritual ailments. The Leper went to the priest to get confirmation, and the person who was once paralyzed carried his own mat as confirmation.<sup>33</sup> But make no mistake, the most incredible thing done that day was that they were forgiven.

Today, we can live a healthy life without being healed of our sinful nature. We must go to Jesus, who provides healing to our physical maladies and our spiritual condition.

---

<sup>33</sup> Garland (2011), p. 244.



## Video Description

Onward | Week 7 | “The First Theological Controversy of Jesus”

TEXT: Luke 5:12-26

Today, we'll be exploring the first theological *controversy* of Jesus. And while, technically, he's already had a bit of conflict in Nazareth (cf. Lu. 4:29-30), that was more mob violence than an attack by some organized group. On the other hand, today's passage will explore his first run-in with official representatives from Judaism.

Interestingly, controversy will become a major characteristic of Jesus' ministry moving forward (cf. Lu. 2:34-35). It seems, wherever he'd go, he'll become a magnet for debate. For instance, though he was a well-known healer, Jesus would often heal people in an unconventional way (cf. Mar. 8:22-26). He will even perform miracles on the *Sabbath* (cf. Lu. 13:14). As we'll soon see, he will *touch* someone with a highly contagious skin disease. But the real disagreement will come when Jesus claims to *forgive* sins. Healing people is one thing, but offering forgiveness too? Who does this Jesus think he is? God?

Pastor's manuscript can be found here: