

Luke 5B

[Luke 5:12](#) ¶ While He was in one of the cities, behold, *there was* a man covered with leprosy; and when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and implored Him, saying, “Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.”

[Luke 5:13](#) And He stretched out His hand and touched him, saying, “I am willing; be cleansed.” And immediately the leprosy left him.

[Luke 5:14](#) And He ordered him to tell no one, “But go and show yourself to the priest and make an offering for your cleansing, just as Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.”

[Luke 5:15](#) But the news about Him was spreading even farther, and large crowds were gathering to hear *Him* and to be healed of their sicknesses.

[Luke 5:16](#) But Jesus Himself would *often* slip away to the wilderness and pray.

- Collecting disciples in the early stage of his ministry
 - Moving throughout Galilee, always with a crowd
 - Still declaring the kingdom of God
 - Teaching with authority, in new ways
 - Healing within the crowd, as a demonstration of his power and authority
 - Also a reflection of his compassion
 - He comes to heal, yes
 - But the more important kind of healing is spiritual
 - Physical healing is a picture of that healing
- Teaches in cities and small towns and along the highway
 - More people in the cities, so that’s where he goes
 - The healing ministry has the potential to overshadow his teaching ministry
 - When he enters a city, his presence stirs up the crowd and attracts interest, primarily for healing
 - Crowds would press in close

- But Jesus doesn't heal every last person
 - Because the healing is a means to an end
 - The end was to substantiate his claims as Messiah
- Leprosy
 - Widely misunderstood disease, even today
 - Infects 1,400 people daily worldwide
 - Bacteria, infects the entire body
 - It prefers to grow in the cooler parts of the body
 - Extremities, like fingers, toes, noses
 - It grows slowly in the tissues of the body
 - And as it grows it removes the pigment from the skin, turning it white
 - And it slowly destroys nerve endings, so that the parts of the body where it grows eventually become numb
 - It's difficult to catch
 - Roughly 95% of all people are natural immune
 - If you are exposed, it takes 8-10 years before symptoms are evident
 - Probably transferred by nasal droplets – sneezing, coughing
 - Can't be caught by touching or other physical contacts
 - The big problem with leprosy is the numbness
 - It's permanent
 - So as extremities lose their feeling, injuries cause damage to the extremities, and infections destroy the flesh, wearing it away
 - The growing damage to the body and the resulting infections eventually lead to more serious infections and death
 - Today it's easily treated with antibiotics

- After a few days, you're no longer contagious & can be healed in 2 years
- Damage to the body is permanent
- There was tremendous fear about this disease and stigma attached to the disease
- Lev 13 provides an entire chapter describes how lepers were to be treated in Jewish society
 - The emphasis in this chapter is whether a leper would be clean or unclean
 - Not all lepers were unclean
 - It depended on the state of the disease
 - You could go into remission
 - Then you were not unclean
 - The priests were the ones required to determine if a leper was clean or unclean
 - Lepers were typically treated cruelly
 - Even if they were clean for a time, they would still often be shunned by society
 - They lived a solitary life in many cases, very sad existence
 - They could be severely beaten or even stoned if they failed to keep their distance as required
 - In fact, in Jesus' day (and still today) leprosy was seen as God's judgment on a person for some secret or hidden sin
 - Obviously, e shouldn't see leprosy as a specific judgment by God,
 - They are under no greater condemnation than any other sinnwe
 - But it is true that the disease is used throughout scripture as a picture of sin and its effect on us
- Leprosy and sin are both more than skin deep

- It impacts the entire body
 - Sin is a part of our flesh, not just a momentary decision
- Leprosy causes a separation for lepers because they defile everything they touch
 - Likewise, sin defiles and those who have sin are separated from fellowship with God
- Leprosy turns the body white over time, even leading to the point when the entire body is white
 - Periods of white skin are typically associated with periods of remission
 - Likewise, we say that when we have been forgiven, our sins are washed clean, washed white
- But ultimately, neither leprosy nor sin can be washed away simply by an external cleaning
 - Eventually, the leprosy leaves remission and becomes active again, causing further destruction of the body until it is destroyed
 - Likewise, anything we might do externally to address the problem of sin is temporary at best
- In the end, sin continues to infect and destroy the body
 - The only solution for either disease is found internally
 - The final answer for sin is an internal cleansing of the spirit that only God can accomplish in us
- And while today, we have antibiotics to cure the disease on the inside of our body,
 - In Jesus day the symbolism was even clearer, since the only hope for a cure of leprosy was also a miracle done by God
 - There was no human solution for the disease
- Finally, when a leper died, his body was burned and even his clothes and personal belongings were burned, in the hope of purifying them from the disease

- Similarly, if the body dies in sin, it will face the burning of God's judgment fire
- In the account, the leper falls to his face and declares that Jesus could heal if he wanted to do it
 - The leper's tactic here is easy to appreciate
 - Lots of sick people, trying to compete for Jesus' attention in the hope of healing
 - Like the people that greet you as you leave a cruise ship
 - They must have been doing anything they could to get Jesus' attention
 - He is an advanced stage of leprosy
 - It's all over him
 - Has deformities
 - He throws himself in front of Jesus, he clears the crowd
 - He uses his sad and frightening state to gain an audience with Jesus
 - He almost dares Jesus to heal him
 - He says, if Jesus wants to do it, He can heal him
 - The statement conveys a degree of faith
 - It acknowledges that Jesus had the power to heal, and that power was limited only by God's will
 - And therefore, the statement implies a belief that Jesus was God Himself
 - Because only God can heal according to His will
 - And in this statement, we have the simplest and clearest statement of Biblical truth concerning God's healing ministry
 - God can heal us at any time if He desires to do so

- Sometimes God chooses to heal us, and sometimes He doesn't choose to heal us
- The fact that God sometimes answers no to our requests for healings is proof in itself that God does not desire that we always be healed
 - Why?
 - Some people live lifetimes in suffering from disease
 - Many people eventually succumb to some illness and die as a result
 - And then on other occasions, God may choose to heal us of an ailment
 - Often the healing comes through natural means, like medicine, a doctor or our own immune system
 - Other times God will heal supernaturally, where no natural explanation exists for the healing
 - But even in those circumstances where God permits healing, it doesn't change the ultimate reality that in the end, we all die of something
 - Something is going to take the life of our body
 - Maybe some other disease, maybe the same disease will return
 - Maybe we will die of an accident
 - The manner of death is irrelevant
 - The point is, our body is not supposed to live forever
 - God intends to replace it one day
 - And before he can give us a new body, he must do away with the old, either through death or the rapture itself
 - This fact alone means that should we ask God to heal us, as this man asks Jesus,
 - And should God choose to honor that request and grant us healing, His purpose in healing us can never be simply for the purpose of preserving our body

- Since He intends to put it in the grave sooner or later, it stands to reason that preserving the body can never be an end in itself for God
 - Why heal you of pneumonia if He knows you will die of cancer 5 years later
 - Why heal you of cancer if he knows you will be hit by a bus next month
 - Why save you from the hurricane if He knows the rapture is coming next week?
- The only answer to that question is that God receives glory in some way by preserving your body in the short term
 - Perhaps he gains glory simply through the display of his might by the healing itself
 - Perhaps he gains glory because our preservation gives us opportunity to praise his name to others
 - Perhaps he gains glory because through our preservation, we have opportunity to raise godly children who serve him and glorify him
 - Perhaps he preserves us so that we might serve Him and his kingdom in some new way
- But the flip side of this truth is that God has no reason to preserve an otherwise dying body merely for the purpose of allowing us a few more years of selfish living
 - Simply because we fear death, a fear that no mature Christian should ever entertain
 - Simply because we long to accomplish some personal goal or experience some earthly pleasure
- So when we ask God to heal us, we must understand, that sooner or later the answer must be no
 - If we hear teaching that tries to tell us that God will heal us anytime we ask so long as we are faithful enough or believing enough

- That kind of teaching is self-evidently wrong
- We can never use a litmus test to measure God's willingness to heal us
 - For example, if someone teaches that God will heal us upon request as long as our faith is strong enough
 - And assuming that person asks for healing and receives it, what would that same teaching say when the person eventually succumbs to some kind of illness and dies, as they must one day do?
 - What do we say then? Do we say their faith ran out? Too bad they didn't keep their faith up, or God would have healed them again?
 - It's pure nonsense
 - You can't say that God's willingness to heal us has anything to do with whether we deserve it or earn it in any sense
- The only measure of whether God will heal us is His will and purpose in the healing
 - And it is true that long life is often spoken in scripture as a blessing from God, and that it is
 - But it is not the chief measure of God's pleasure in us nor his blessing upon us
- And I can offer you no great proof of this fact than to simply remind you of how brief our Lord's life was on earth, barely more than 30 years
 - Yet we know how very pleased the Father was with His son
 - So a short earthly life is not necessarily a life with less blessing nor offering less pleasure to God
 - Our days are numbered according to His will
 - For that matter, neither is a life free of illness or hardship a measure of God's happiness in us
- The apostles, the martyrs are testimony to the fact that God may bring hardship to his children, even as they seek to do His will

- Jesus says I am willing, and stretches out his hand and heals the man
 - Then Jesus gives him some odd instructions
 - He says don't tell anyone that I healed you
 - Instead, present yourself to the priests at the temple with your offering
 - Why did Jesus tell the man to do this? Lev 13
 - Lev 13 is an exhaustive description of rules and regulations for how lepers were to live within society
 - It included instructions on how a leper might gain a declaration of cleanliness from the priests
 - The priests were to follow the steps in Lev to determine if a man was clean or unclean
 - And the instructions that Jesus gives this man were according to the requirements of Lev 13
 - This is why Jesus says do this as Moses commanded
 - And do it as a testimony to them, the priests
 - He wanted them to visit the priests and receive the judgment of the priests concerning their clean condition
 - What's going on here?
 - The Law in Lev 13 provided for how a Jew should be declared cured of leprosy
 - But up to the time of Jesus, no Jew had ever been cured of leprosy
 - The provisions of Lev for declaring a man cured of leprosy had never been used
 - Therefore, a Jewish teaching had taken hold that said only the Messiah would be able to cure a leper
 - In fact, there were three kinds of miracles that were uniquely attributed to the Messiah

- One was healing a leper
- The other was casting a demon out from a mute man
- The third is healing a man born blind, John 9
- These miracles were uniquely miracles that proved the person was the Messiah
 - So as Jesus heals this man, he sends him to the priests as a testimony that the Messiah had arrived
 - This would have resulted in the Jewish leaders sending men to investigate the situation and declare if the Messiah had actually arrived
- But even before that can begin, notice that Jesus said this man was not to speak of his experience except to the priests
 - In Mark's account we hear how the man disobeyed Jesus' instructions

[Mark 1:44](#) and He *said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."

[Mark 1:45](#) But he went out and began to proclaim it freely and to spread the news around, to such an extent that Jesus could no longer publicly enter a city, but stayed out in unpopulated areas; and they were coming to Him from everywhere.

- Jesus asks this man to not sensationalize the event by declaring it in the wrong way
 - The problem was the man's report didn't communicate the full meaning and truth of the experience
 - The man declared that he had been healed by Jesus
 - This declaration brought great interest and attention
 - But the declaration he should have brought was that the Messiah had arrived
 - His message emphasized the way Jesus had cured his physical ailment
 - But it was missing the most important point, that Jesus was God living among us

- What a powerful example of the danger of spreading a trivialized gospel...
- Now we can see the impact of this trivialized message
 - It leads to more and more crowds, but they follow Jesus for the wrong reason
 - And their determination to receive healing actually stand in the way of Jesus' teaching ministry
 - He must often retreat from cities and stay in more secluded areas
 - And he must seek seclusion from time to time
 - The message of his true ministry is drowned out by the self-seeking hordes

[Luke 5:17](#) ¶ One day He was teaching; and there were *some* Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting *there*, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and *from* Jerusalem; and the power of the Lord was *present* for Him to perform healing.

[Luke 5:18](#) And *some* men *were* carrying on a bed a man who was paralyzed; and they were trying to bring him in and to set him down in front of Him.

[Luke 5:19](#) But not finding any *way* to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down through the tiles with his stretcher, into the middle *of the crowd*, in front of Jesus.

[Luke 5:20](#) Seeing their faith, He said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven you."

- In Mark's account, we hear that this scene takes place Capernaum
 - The homes of that day often included a center area like a courtyard
 - Where the roof opened up to allow light into the center of the home
 - Jesus was probably in the home with a crowd in the courtyard
 - The men lower their friend into the courtyard
 - Trying to drop him directly in front of Jesus
 - The religious leaders of Israel had come up from Jerusalem to investigate the possibility that Jesus was the Messiah
 - Based on the healing of the leper as well as the rest of the Jesus' healings

- The Pharisees were the conservative keepers of the Law in their day
 - Also present were the scribes, who had the duty of interpreting the law
 - The judges of the law
 - The first scribe was Ezra
 - Also Sadducees and Sanhedrin members
 - They were held in esteem by the people, though they weren't entirely appreciated
- So, here's a man who find himself in front of Jesus
 - And of course, his interest is to be healed
 - No one could help but notice that he was paralyzed
 - He wanted to be healed
 - Perhaps Jesus was teaching and as he's talking, the man is lowered in front of his face
 - Everything stops
 - Jesus witnesses their faith made evident by their bold act
 - And He also knows that the religious leaders are watching
- These are the men who have traveled to validate the claims reported by the leper
 - Jesus is healing lepers
 - He is doing the Messianic miracles
 - Perhaps the Messiah has arrived
 - But naturally, the leadership are skeptical
 - So they watch this scene unfold
 - And Jesus knowing they are watching says, you are healed?
 - No, He says your sins are forgiven
 - Do you think that's what the man wanted to hear

- I doubt it
- But even more important, it's not what the Pharisees expected to hear
 - And these words were spoken for their benefit

[Luke 5:21](#) The scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, "Who is this *man* who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?"

[Luke 5:22](#) But Jesus, aware of their reasonings, answered and said to them, "Why are you reasoning in your hearts?"

[Luke 5:23](#) "Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins have been forgiven you,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'?"

[Luke 5:24](#) "But, so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,"—He said to the paralytic—"I say to you, get up, and pick up your stretcher and go home."

[Luke 5:25](#) Immediately he got up before them, and picked up what he had been lying on, and went home glorifying God.

[Luke 5:26](#) They were all struck with astonishment and *began* glorifying God; and they were filled with fear, saying, "We have seen remarkable things today."

- The Pharisees take the bait
 - They begin to grumble again
 - They said only God can forgive sins
 - So either this man is blaspheming or he is God
 - This is exactly the observation that Jesus intended the leaders to make
 - He was either God or a fake
 - Like CS Lewis famously said: Liar Lunatic or Lord
 - The trap having been set, now Jesus closes in
 - He knew what they were speaking in their hearts, which must have been a real shock of course
 - He says what's easier, saying your sins are forgiven or telling a lame man get up and walk?
 - What he means of course, is that if I say your sins are forgiven, there is no way to prove my statement false

- You can't expose me as a fraud because we have no way to investigate the truth of that claim
- Therefore, it's easy to say your sins are forgiven
- But if someone says they can heal a lame man, it's a much more difficult statement
 - Because it can be easily verified
 - You can't fake that one very easily
- So Jesus says, so that you know that I can forgive sins, I will also tell this man to walk
 - So that when I say the harder thing and prove my power in his healing
 - Then you will also know that I can be trusted when I say the easier thing, your sins have been forgiven
 - Jesus was setting up a proof for his claim as Messiah to impress the leadership
 - Though he could have healed the man first, he elected to save it for last so he could use the circumstance to His advantage in contending with the leaders of Israel
- Consider the people's reaction
 - The man healed praised God
 - The people were struck with astonishment and were filled with fear
 - We may see God do great things in our lives too
 - But it his willingness to forgive our sin which is the true miracle
 - Let's be sure that our interest in healing or other earthly needs never overshadow our thankfulness for his mercy