

Raise the Roof

We are back in our series, focused on the words of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke, red letters in the way some Bibles are printed, that we are calling *Church in the Red*.

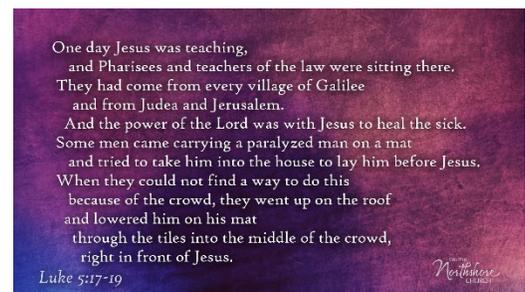
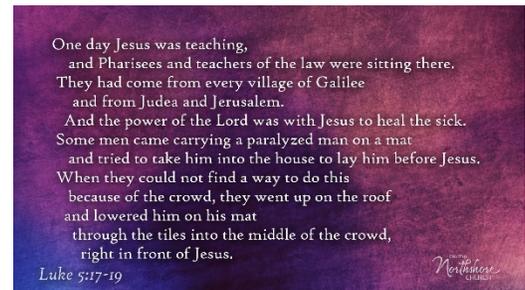
It is a dramatic scene as men brought their paralyzed friend to Jesus for help. Finding no other way to get to Jesus, they dropped their friend through an opening they created in the roof of the house... a *drastic* measure, but these were **desperate** times.

You saw that I titled this message *Raise the Roof*, which seemed *clever* enough (I really don't give a great deal of thought to these titles). Lee Gunter suggested what is likely a better title: **Lowering Your Expectations**. A better *play on words* that highlights that these friends had faith, expectations, that caused them to go to great lengths, including lowering their paralyzed friend down through an impromptu skylight.

Let's walk through the passage that begins with verse 17 of chapter 5:

¹⁷ One day Jesus was teaching, and Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there. They had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem. ¹

There are several *firsts* in this passage; here is the **first first**: *Pharisees*. Pharisees show up in the Gospel of Luke over 20 times; this is the first. These were the ones leading the religious opposition to Jesus. Their power was found in strictly defining the rules of what was *holy* and *religiously pure* and *acceptable*... and then enforcing those rules. Throughout Luke we will see them challenging Jesus, attempting to show that he was not pure, acceptable, or holy. More important than the Pharisees challenges to Jesus was that **Jesus challenged the Pharisees**. Jesus was a threat to them and their power.



¹ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Lk 5:17). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

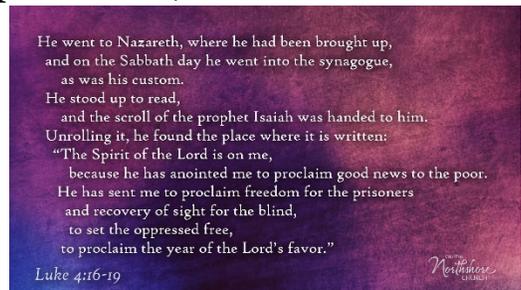
Jesus consistently threatened human power (especially religious power); He remains that threat today.

Word had spread about Jesus. Publicity brought those seeking help... and now we see that publicity brought those seeking trouble, too. It seems that the Pharisees sat in some sort of *official delegation*, representing religious leaders from throughout the region, even from *headquarters* in Jerusalem. The power of religion was in the room.

And the power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal the sick.²

I've been *beating this drum* consistently over the past weeks; allow me to take *one more swing at it*. Here we are continuing to see Jesus fulfilling His mission as He stated it in chapter 4. Jesus, quoting the Prophet Isaiah, proclaimed:

- ¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”³

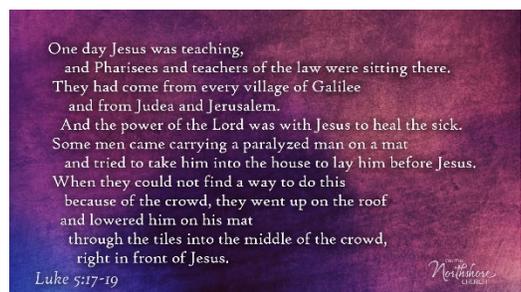


The power of the Lord was the Spirit of the Lord; the Holy Spirit. Jesus was proclaiming good news, freeing those bound by disease, bringing relief to the oppressed.

- ¹⁸ Some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus.
¹⁹ When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus.⁴

Like we said, these were extraordinary means as these men sought healing for their neighbor.

It is worth noting that houses and roofs and such were different in that time and place.



² [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Lk 5:17). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

³ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Lk 4:18–19). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

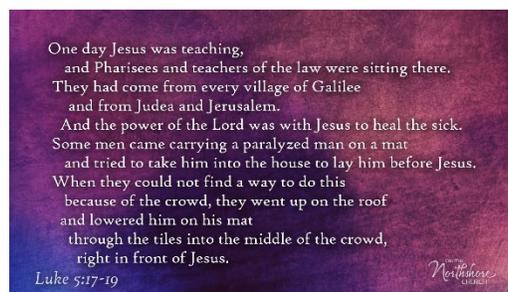
⁴ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Lk 5:18–19). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

If someone wanted to drop into my house like this, it would take several tall ladders and a heavy-duty saw. This is the sort of thing that should only be done by experts; *don't try this at home*.



One would have to deal with pitched roofs and attics and such. But in those days, roofs were often part of the living space, easily accessible by stairs. Tiles could be moved to expose the living space beneath without doing much permanent damage.

So... while it may have not been as destructive and dangerous as trying to lower someone through this roof, in this auditorium... it was still an extraordinary measure. They still hauled their paralyzed friend to the top, made the way, and lowered him in. They were not going to let a mere crowd of people stand in the way.

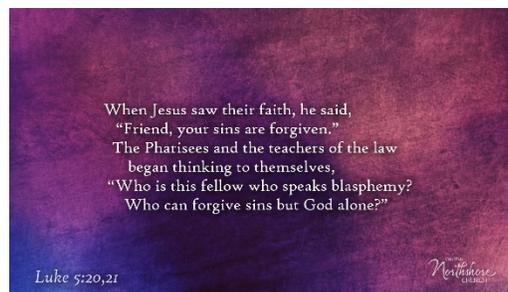


It must have been quite a scene; can we even imagine such a thing. How would we respond? I suppose today we'd evacuate the building and call the police.

But...

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

Here we find another *first* in Luke's Gospel: ***faith***. This is the first time we see the word *faith*. I suppose we've seen acts of faith in the previous passages and chapters... but this is the first time it is noted.



If you are like me, with a lot of familiarity with the Bible, or even just a bit of familiarity, we might just assume that *faith* is always there, and even that the Pharisees were always around. While Jesus has already demonstrated His miraculous power, this is the first time He acknowledges faith.

We generally think of faith as that which is required from us by God. Faith is our part to play in this cosmic transaction. But noticing that this is first time faith is noticed reminds us that God acts first.

⁵ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Lk 5:20). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Sure, we take our steps toward God... we believe, and trust, and put our faith in Him. But faith is always preceded by God's action; God moves **first** and faith is the response... whether to Creation, God's Word, or His miraculous activity.

Jesus called the man **friend**. It brings to mind the scene in the previous passage, the passage we studied last week where Jesus healed the leper. Paralytics, too, were outcast... cutoff from society, outside of the economy, and banned from religious life (much like lepers). When Jesus referred to the paralyzed one as **friend**, it was nearly as powerful as the way Jesus touched the leper, first, before He healed Him.

But in this case, Jesus didn't start by healing the paralyzed one, but rather proclaimed that "your sins have been forgiven you"⁶.

I doubt **that** is what the paralyzed man had come for; that wasn't why his friends went to such drastic measures. He was there for healing, not forgiveness of sins. It was wonderful news (Good News) far better news than anything else, the best gift imaginable. And while the paralyzed man benefitted from such a wonderful gift, I'm pretty sure that this proclamation wasn't directed only (or even primarily) at the paralyzed one.

Jesus was **teaching**, and the Pharisees and teachers of the Law were there. It seems clear that Jesus intended to provoke them. It was likely the only hope that they might learn anything.

I get it. I do my best work, and learn my best lessons, when I'm irritated. I wish it wasn't so; I wish I was wired differently. But those of you who know me well, and have worked with me, know that I often do my best work when I'm at least a little *ticked off*. When I'm unsatisfied with the circumstances, irritated with the system, or even mad at myself... that agitation is often the place from which I accomplish my best work.

So... Jesus *stirred up* the Pharisees.

²¹ 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?"⁷

The crowd wasn't the only obstacle between that paralyzed one and his healing from Jesus. There was the practical obstacle of all those people... the obstacle overcome by zealous friends who went to extraordinary measures. But there was also the obstacle of the religious ones.

⁶ Green, J. B. (1997). *The Gospel of Luke* (p. 241). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

⁷ *The New International Version*. (2011). (Lk 5:21). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Religious people too often stand in the way of people finding what they need in Jesus. Religious people stand in judgement. Religious people hold up the process, stating “that isn’t the way it is done.” Religious people resist change. Religious people don’t even want to endure the slightest inconvenience. Religious people want people to behave before they believe or belong. Religious people put up barriers, especially for the marginalized, the poor, the outsiders, the needy, and the unclean. **We** religious people can so easily be an obstacle.

This may be a bit too granular... but it may be worth noting that the Pharisees appear to have had it wrong; Jesus did not forgive the man’s sins. The NIV translation on the screen has it right, as it reads:

“Friend, your sins are forgiven.”⁸

But the NIV, since it is English, lacks the precision of tenses that a language like the original Greek offers. To get even a bit more nerdy/precise:

Jesus’ pronouncement of forgiveness is cast in the perfect passive (“your sins have been forgiven you”), first denoting that the man’s sins had been forgiven *by God [the Father]*, then asserting that Jesus [the Son] is authorized by God to announce forgiveness on God’s behalf.⁹

This was Jesus fulfilling His mission, **proclaiming** freedom, release, and forgiveness. Jesus wasn’t necessarily in disagreement with the Pharisees; it is God, alone, who can forgive sins. Jesus (the Son) started by merely proclaiming what God (the Father) was doing.

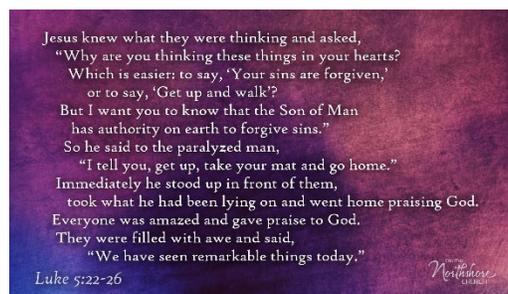
It may be a *distinction without a difference*, but these were Pharisees, ones who obsessed on the precision of things. It is funny how the one’s obsessed with rules often so easily give themselves license to bend them.

²² Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, “Why are you thinking these things in your hearts?”²³ Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk’?¹⁰

It is an interesting question.

I suppose both are easy to **say**; forgiven is a three-syllable word... but none of these words are hard to pronounce.

But that isn’t what Jesus *meant*. The question He implied is, “Which of these is easier to **do**? To forgive sins or to heal?”



⁸ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Lk 5:20). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁹ Green, J. B. (1997). [The Gospel of Luke](#) (p. 241). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

¹⁰ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Lk 5:22–23). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Healing may simply take time or medicine... but forgiveness of sins, as the Pharisees rightly proclaimed, is capable by God alone. Forgiveness of sins is the greatest work, the most profound miracle.

We might want healing, or provision, or answers now, even preferring such over anything else... but forgiveness of sins is the highest prize, the best gift.

Another implied question is this: Which of these is easier to prove?

On the spot, it is hard to prove forgiveness of sins. Sure, there is the very real senses of relief and gratitude that come with forgiveness, and there is the changed life that should result from forgiveness of sins (over time)... but when it comes to hard, measurable evidence, the answer is obvious. We can **see** healing; we can **prove** healing.

²³ Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk’? ²⁴ But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” So he said to the paralyzed man, “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.” ²⁵ Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God.¹¹

Here is yet another first; Jesus refers to Himself as *Son of Man*. It may seem like an odd phrase. We might think that this is in tension with claims of His virgin birth, but it is not... it is not a claim that Jesus is the son of **a** man. We might think that this is a matter of Jesus identifying with humanity... a son of mankind. But that isn’t what is going on either.

Just as Jesus relied on the Prophet Isaiah for His **mission**, here Jesus is relying on the Prophets Daniel and Ezekiel for this **title**. Looking to Daniel and Ezekiel, we see *Son of Man* as the title of the apocalyptic Messiah, the One who has the power and authority to deliver God’s People, thoroughly and eternally.

Furthermore, Jesus cleared up the ambiguity; Jesus, being God’s Messiah, the Son of Man, does have the authority to forgive sins. This is another first; by calling himself Son of Man, Jesus is claiming divinity. Yes, only God can forgive sin... and the Son of Man (Jesus) forgives sin... do the math.

Proof of that power, to forgive sins, is to miraculously heal. Miraculous healing isn’t merely a momentary trick, but a demonstration of the power of Jesus to forgive sin. The miracle of healing points to the more profound miracle to forgive sins. And it underscores that Jesus is God.

And healing results in glorifying God.

¹¹ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Lk 5:22–25). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

²⁶ Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, “We have seen remarkable things today.” ¹²

This is the point of every miracle, to build faith, to glorify God, and to draw people to Him.

So I’ll ask it again, so what?

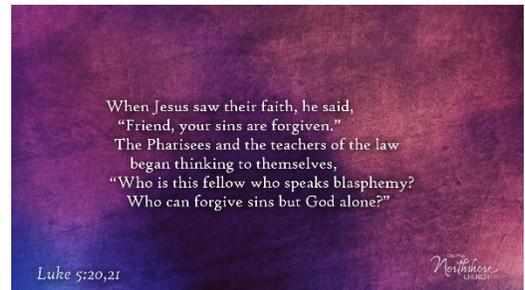
Perhaps it we might consider with whom we might align ourselves in this account. With whom do we best identify?

I sure hope we wouldn’t align ourselves with the **Pharisees**, challenging Jesus and standing in the way of someone receiving what they need from Jesus. We wouldn’t want to be those types of people... but maybe we should consider how we might be like a Pharisee from time to time, and rid ourselves of such behavior. When are we bound and blinded by our religious pursuits in such a way that it stands as an obstacle to others getting to Jesus?

When Jesus is at work, let’s be sure not to stand in the way. Let’s be sure not to be too awfully concerned with our demands, and our questions... even our preferences and comfort. Let’s be sure not to be overly concerned with the form of things. Anyone want to be a Pharisee?

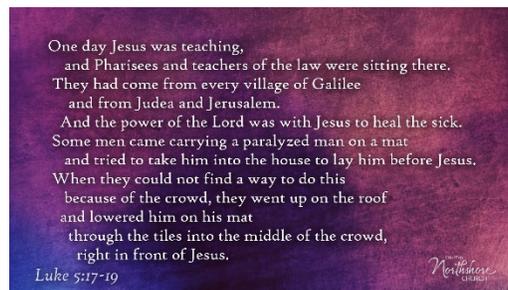
It could be that we identify most with the **paralyzed one**. We are here today with a need. And we hope that Jesus can meet that need. We believe Jesus answers, Jesus heals, and Jesus saves. We took time today, like we often do, to bring our needs to Jesus.

Friend, know that Jesus can meet your need. And know that the most deep and profound need we each have is forgiveness of sins. We need salvation, we need forgiveness, we need freedom and deliverance... and Jesus meets that need. People have gone to great lengths to bring you here. Nobody has cut a whole in a roof and lowered any of us in today... but someone may have brought you. And even if you are here alone today... still lots of people have made a way. People have sacrificed to make this place and this moment possible. People have prepared in support of you, and each of us. Go ahead and receive from Jesus all He has for you today.



¹² [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Lk 5:26). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

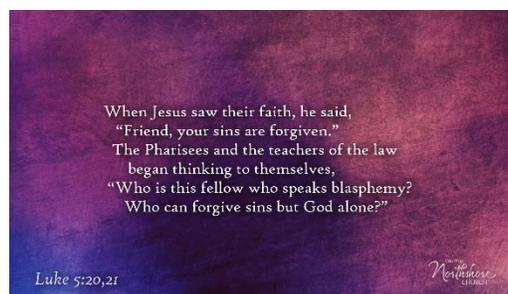
Finally, perhaps we can identify with those friends. Christians are called to be like those friends... to be outward-focused and go to great lengths to bring people to Jesus. Sacrificing, even going outside of the box, perhaps even risking reputation and dignity, doing whatever it takes to bring people to Jesus.



We should take extra care to help those who are outcast, poor, and sick. Whether literally paralyzed, or metaphorically paralyzed, people need help to make their way to Jesus. People rarely make it to Jesus alone.

Will we have faith for them?

Our text says that Jesus saw **their** faith. We don't know who brought the most faith that day... I suspect that the friends might have had more faith than that paralyzed one. They were certainly the ones taking the most dramatic steps of faith.



When we pray for others, and when we sacrifice for others... when we make a way for others, in the natural and in the spiritual, we are acting on God's call. When we bring our expectations on behalf of others, and lower them into the lap of Jesus (to use Lee's turn of a phrase) we are doing the work of God.



We might ask ourselves, today, "What can I do? What can we do?"

Can we raise a roof?

Can we give?

Can we serve?

Can we pray?

Can we testify?



Let's rededicate ourselves, again, to this holy work.