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South Church of Fredericksburg, TX
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The Giver and Not the Gift
Luke 5:17-26

Thank you, Pastor Paige. I have two confessions, three really bad explanations of this text that I have run into, 12 observations from the text, one glorious reality, and two applications to your life. If you're counting, that's 20 things. Let's pray for help.

Father, I love being with your people and seeing what you are doing to make your name great and to increase their joy and dependence on you. Please, help me love them right now by showing them more of you. You are the greatest reality in the universe. Amen.

Confession: After I realized that I would be with you on Mother's Day I told Pastor Paige that what I had in mind for you was not focused specifically on mothers. Your good pastor assured me that was not an issue. But I do hope to make a connection between this text and the call on parents and other leaders.

My second confession is that I am not a pastor; I sit in pews (or chairs) as you do.

So, who am I?

I am a member of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, MN. I work at Desiring God. I am married to Dianne and father to Paul, Hannah, Daniel and Johnny. Paul lives with multiple disabilities - blindness, autism, cognitive disabilities, seizures, eating and sleeping disorders, etc., etc. And God used that boy to call me into saving faith when I was dead in my sins. Hopefully that helps you see why I'm passionately interested in the healing passages in the Bible.

And I want you to know that God is good in all his ways, and all his works, he is glorious beyond imagination, he delights in all the ways he creates human beings. I did not always know that, and I want you to know that.

To the text: what was read is the accounting of a man referred to as a paralytic which also appears in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark. He is brought to Jesus by men who lowered him through a roof. I chose this for a simple reason: up until God called me from death to life I was a 'good' person who attended church, didn't give my parents

trouble, lived a conservative lifestyle, volunteered at church, read my Bible and was dead in my sins.

I knew this story well, and I was dead in my sins. This story is one that many people know even in the culture - but is so frequently misunderstood and misapplied that it actually works against the cause of Christ!

So, I want to point you to the primary purpose of this text as others taught me - as one sitting where you are - so that you are prepared to read other accounts like this in their proper perspective.

Because if you don't, bad things happen.

Here are three really bad explanations I have run into. (I am making some broad generalizations - we could spend a long time unpacking each. I'll let Paige do that!).

First bad explanation: People of faith always get healed of their diseases or disabilities. It says so, sort of, that Jesus saw their faith and then somewhere along the line the man got healed.

Conclusion: If you don't have faith, you don't get healed - it is your fault if you live with a disability. But, if you have enough faith, you get something good in this life, like legs that work or a better car than your neighbor or a better job with more money.

This is a wicked theology, contrary to God's word. Pastor Paige wrote a really helpful blog post on this in December 2012 that I recommend you read. The Apostle Peter warns us: Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. (1 Peter 4:12-13 ESV) So, we need to ask why is the evil prosperity gospel increasing in its influence around the world? One answer - it makes God accountable to us. If we have faith, God is contractually obligated to give us what we want. We are, in this way of thinking, more powerful than God.

Second bad explanation: Charitably, God is confused; uncharitably, God hates people with disabilities. Less seen in the theological circles we run around in here, but you don't have to look too hard to find it in seminaries and books and journals. Here is the assertion - Jesus forgave him of his sins, therefore Jesus must think his disability is because of his sins. Jesus is creating a cause and effect relationship between sin and

disability - which makes Jesus wrong-headed, or a product of his culture, or evil. But since we have John 9:3 where Jesus denies that sin caused the disability, he must be confused. For those who argue this point, the entire Bible is confused and illogical. They argue, "since we can see this confusion and Jesus could not, we are able, even right, to take what we want from the Bible and ignore, deny or remove other things." Conclusion: We are more wise than God.

Third bad explanation: Jesus is nice. He heals people - that's nice. He feeds people. That's nice. He tells bullies to stop bullying, cheaters to stop cheating, and doesn't let that woman get stoned to death. A little boy gets healed of his epilepsy, a woman gets her back straightened, this man gets to walk and we all get to go to heaven because Jesus is nice. I like this Jesus because he does nice things for people. In fact, the reason he does nice things for people is because we are so valuable to him. Isn't it clear, we are the most valuable thing in the universe because God serves us. We are of greater value than God.

This one is simply in the cultural air we breathe, our innate human greatness and inherent goodness. And it is killing people.

So, since my boy hasn't been healed I either don't have faith, or a confused God created a chaotic world with no purpose to his disabilities or this nice God isn't very nice to me and to my son. No hope, no purpose, no future.

But, let us read Luke 5:17-26 together and look at all the words. I will make 12 observations while reading the text, which is a little awkward but Lord willing it will work:

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

(Observation 1: the crowds had come to hear Jesus teach).

And the power of the Lord was with him to heal

(Observation 2: Jesus has unusual power).

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, 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

(Observation 3: the men were determined to get to Jesus).

And when he saw their faith,

(Observation 4: Jesus can see things we cannot see)

he said, “Man, your sins are forgiven you.”

(Observation 5: Jesus can say things we cannot say - dare not say. And he sees the greater problem in this man’s life, greater than his paralysis.).

And the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, saying, “Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?” When Jesus perceived their thoughts,

(Observation 6: he knows our thoughts; another evidence of his divinity)

he answered them, “Why do you question in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Rise and walk’?”

(Observation 7: It IS easier for men to say ‘your sins are forgiven.’ It is harder for one man to say to another man, "rise from your disability", because we can’t do it and it is obvious we can’t do it. Regarding human beings and legs, however, we know everything was made through Jesus - John 1:3 - and he holds the universe together by the word of his power - Hebrews 1:3. Conclusion: for Jesus healing is easy. But forgiving sins will cost him his life in a horrific way. Which is easier for Jesus, indeed!)

But that you may know

(Observation 8: Jesus wants us to know things! He even wants doubters to know things!)

that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”

(Observation 9: he wants us to know things about himself! Breathtaking things! Things that should make us fall down and worship! HE HAS AUTHORITY TO FORGIVE SINS!)

—he said to the man who was paralyzed—“I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go

home.” And immediately

(Observation 10: When Jesus speaks, things happen)

he rose up before them and picked up what he had been lying on and went home, glorifying God

(Observation 11: when Jesus tells us to do something, we should do it!).

And amazement seized them all, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, “We have seen extraordinary things today.”

(Observation 12: Yes, they did, but did they really see the most amazing thing. This man has been dead for millennia - his legs died with him. But his new life in Christ has persisted and will persist because of Jesus. Now that’s amazing!)

So, this is not primarily about a paralyzed man or about physical healing. This is about JESUS - and it is about his authority to do something only God can do and which is intensely costly to Jesus. This is the glorious truth! Jesus wants us to know that he has authority over sin! The kind of authority that leads to our ever increasing measure of joy at being with him for eternity!

Children, do you remember what Pastor Paige pointed us to in the Bible? The disciples were frightened by the very bad storm, and the man with demons frightened other people because he could not be controlled! And a bunch of pigs died! But that story wasn’t really about pigs or storms, was it? No! It was about Jesus - the weather obeys Jesus! The demons obeyed Jesus! Even the man who was rescued from the demons wanted to come with Jesus because he was so grateful - and he obeyed Jesus, too. Those accounts from the Bible are also about Jesus as God!

Let us revisit the three bad arguments I mentioned at the beginning:

Can I make God do things? Ridiculous! Without Jesus I am a dead man; we are all dead - And you were dead in the trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1 ESV). God gives the faith and God makes the miracle of new life in Christ happen with spiritual eyes to see him - having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints (Ephesians 1:18 ESV). I can’t do that and that’s what I desperately need! I need that much more than physical capacities.

Am I more wise than Jesus? No! Jesus, who knows the ends from the beginning and reveals things beyond our ability to understand - like a Holy God who rescues sinful, wicked people who have the audacity to think they know more than Jesus does about his own creation.

Am I more valuable than Jesus? Oh, I am valuable, God says so, but I am not more valuable than the one who needs nothing when I need everything. He is the vine; I am a needy branch who can do NOTHING apart from Jesus. He is the Alpha and the Omega. He is the source of hope and truth and life. He is Holy. To be sure, Jesus is exceedingly kind and gracious and loving, but he is not small and nice and pleasant. He is GOD!

I got that sitting in the pews, and being encouraged to read my Bible, and encouraged to ask the Holy Spirit to help me know more about this Jesus and this God. We, all of us, have access to God.

And he helps us frequently through the men in this pulpit or the books that God has given through Godly people or conference messages (aside - on the issue of disability Desiring God did a conference which I can highly recommend). And if you want to talk more about disability and the Bible, I'll hang around for awhile to talk or pray or whatever.

But getting intellectual arguments right about God is only half of the equation, and deadly if we don't get the heart right as well.

When you love God and treasure God and want to know more about him, you read His book with care and with affections that spill over into other areas of vital importance. I want to make just two applications among many that are possible here.

1. For yourself: You know that this God who loves you and has called you from death to life will help you when things are hard in your ministry or your marriage or your parenting or whatever is hard. And life will be hard. He will not abandon you. And, you already know you need wisdom greater than you have and strength greater than you have and resources greater than you have. It is good to be dependent on one who is infinitely strong and wise and who is for you because of Jesus.

2. For others: When you approach this book with expectation and God increases your affections for him, ask him that his affections for you spill over into action for other people. And that will include people who aren't very nice and who want God to be small

and comfortable and pleasant and contained.

Here is a small but really important example. You will need God to help you when men like I was approach you and accuse God and the Bible of things that are not true - because some of those men will be wolves, and some will be broken-hearted sheep. You will need wisdom to know whether I am speaking from a root of disbelief and bitterness or from a sorrowful heart.

Consider Job 6:26 - Do you think that you can reprove words, when the speech of a despairing man is wind? Sometimes the hurt is speaking horrible things, and it is just wind that you should let go right by you without correction.

You see, the words from the wolf and from the sheep may be exactly the same words, yet one needs your sharp correction and one needs your tears and comfort.

This Jesus who has authority over paralyzed legs and broken backs and depressed minds and genetic anomalies and cancer and dementia (oh how much you will want a God who has authority over all things when dementia enters your family!) and sin and death, he promised to send you the helper (John 14:26-27):

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

Jesus has all authority. He demonstrated it here in Luke 5 by healing one man so we could know more about him, and by giving us a book so we could know more about him! That is the primary, glorious reality of this text, everything else is secondary to that, even the good gift of healing paralyzed legs that turned to dust centuries ago.

Please, use your time well because God may be pleased to use you to help me see Jesus and to give me a heart that longs to be with this Jesus who has authority over everything - like a boy with multiple disabilities who he doesn't heal, and a wife with the constant specter of cancer over her, and all the sinful failings of my heart that is prone to wander. God might be pleased to use you to reveal that, because of Jesus, my son's life has a great purpose and I am free!

And that is the connection to Mother's Day. My Pastor John once did a sermon he entitled To Be a Mother is a Call to Suffer.

Mothers suffer when their children are born. Mothers suffer when children leave them and go to the mission field. Mothers suffer when their children die. Mothers suffer when their children are foolish. "A wise son makes a father glad, but a foolish son is a grief to his mother" ([Proverbs 10:1](#)). To be a mother is a call to suffer. Oh yes, it's more. But it's not less.

Then he closes that sermon with this:

If it takes disappointment and loss and heartache and calamity and bitter providences – then, for Christ's sake, and for the sake of our eternal joy seeing and savoring him, let it come. Amen.

A paralyzed man was brought to Jesus by four friends - and given life eternally with Jesus because Jesus knew what his real issue was, and it wasn't paralysis. What suffering do you have today which is God's means to give you more of him - forever?

Let us pray. God, give us more of you, more of your word, more affections for you, greater confidence in you. Please, prepare these friends and help them in all the purposes you have for them to make much of you. So that more of them are ready to be used by you to rescue more men like me and families like mine. For your name's sake and for our eternal joy. In Jesus' name. Amen.