

We are continuing our series 'Summer in the Son', where we are taking a closer look at Jesus from the gospel of Luke. Each week as we observe the ministry of Jesus, we are building layer upon layer to give us a fuller perspective of who Jesus is and what he came to do. We've discussed the temptation of Christ, Jesus' mission, and his authority, and we've seen Jesus perform incredible miracles. Today our focus will be on the **deity of Christ**. This particular passage marks a shift in Jesus' ministry as it reveals Christ's ultimate purpose for coming to the world: forgiving sins. Consequently, it also begins to lay out the road to the cross.

As we begin, I want us to reflect on our relationship with Jesus for a moment. How's that going, by the way? How have you been growing in your walk with Christ? Recently, I was listening in on a conversation and was struck by what was being said. One individual said that the only way to have true accountability is to have God's love shed abroad in our hearts, which means that at the end of the day, our personal relationship with Christ matters. We must take the time as professing believers to understand in greater depth what God did for us. What Jesus' forgiveness means to us personally, what it means to be loved by God, what it looks like to plumb the depths of the scriptures, not to check it off our bible reading plan, but diligently searching them to know God more. And finally, what it looks like to pray with persistence, not to get God on the same page with us, but rather to cause us to be aligned with him. I believe that the love of God, in Christ Jesus, is meant to be experienced and applied to our lives. I don't think it happens in an emotionally charged worship service but rather over a life committed to applying God's word to our hearts daily.

I wanted to say this because the passage we are looking at today is likely familiar to us. You've probably heard it in Sunday School if you've grown up going to church. We've probably heard it preached dozens of times and in multiple ways. So to some degree, you will likely have heard everything I am about to say, but my hope is that as we look at this passage again, we can see Jesus more clearly and understand more accurately so that our faith can grow.

So let's approach this passage with fresh eyes.

Luke begins by saying in verse 17, **"On one of those days, as he was teaching, Pharisees and the 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."**

Unlike the gospel of Mark, Luke doesn't give the location of where this happened. Luke is simply trying to help the reader understand that Jesus' ministry is picking up steam

and is spreading rapidly. Even to the point of gaining the attention of the religious leaders. Luke first mentions the Pharisees in his gospel account in this story. So imagine with me, we've been introduced to the hero, Jesus, and now we are introduced to the story's villain. Has someone ever stood over your shoulder and watched you as you worked? That is perhaps the most nerve-racking experience. You're bound to mess up. That's exactly why the religious leaders are there. They came from every village in the surrounding area to find fault in Jesus' ministry. Matthew 12:4 says, "the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him." Destroying Jesus was their purpose.

The Pharisees were a relatively small yet influential group of nonpriestly separatists who thought it was their job to keep the nation faithful to the Mosaic law. The teachers of the law, often referred to as scribes, worked with the Pharisees, and many scribes were Pharisees themselves. These influential religious leaders weren't there to worship Jesus; instead, they were there to find fault in his ministry to maintain their control.

However, we're told that in contrast to these influential men, "the power of the Lord was with him to heal." Interestingly, this phrase only appears in one other place in scripture, in Exodus 12. One commentator said that this phrase equates Jesus' ministry with the authority of God found in freeing Israel from captivity. In Christ, a new exodus is at hand.

You can almost feel the electricity in the air as Jesus' ministry conflicts with the religious leaders of the day. While this is happening inside the house, on the outside, we read in verses 18-19 "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."

Homes in this area would've had flat roofs made with large beams. Across the top of them were laid sticks and bundles of grass covered with mud. There would've likely been stairs leading up to the roof or, at the very least, a ladder. Roofs were often used as a place to gather in the evenings, much like a porch would function today. These men would have brought their friend on top of the roof and started to dig through the many layers. This would've been highly distracting as debris fell from the roof on the people below.

You can almost get the picture in your mind as the layers are removed and light begins to fill the room from above; in the sunlight, you can make out the silhouette of a man

being lowered at the feet of Jesus. I call it a divine illustration, and Jesus takes this opportunity to make an incredible statement.

In verse 20, Jesus says, "And when he saw their faith, he said, "Man, your sins are forgiven you."

I have to say, that's not what I would've expected. First, it's important to understand that Jesus is not connecting this man's condition to his sin. This doesn't seem to be Jesus' pattern for healing. We can see this in John 9. Instead, Jesus is using this man's condition as an illustration in the middle of his teaching to show how we are all spiritually helpless before God. This is a picture of us all being broken at the feet of Jesus. Taking this opportunity, Jesus uses it to speak to our greatest need, and this is the moment Jesus says something that would change the trajectory of his ministry. He proclaims this man's sins forgiven. He does this in front of the religious leaders, and as a result, they begin questioning Jesus, saying, "Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" What makes this incredibly challenging is that the religious leaders are right. It is blasphemous to think that you would have the ability to forgive sins if you're not God, but they are only half right.

At this moment, Jesus perceived their thoughts and 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'?"

In every way, Jesus is revealing to us who he is. Whereas Jesus could've just healed the man and continued his ministry, he took the opportunity to make a bold claim about himself. That's what Luke is trying to get us to consider, who is this?

This story is a powerful display of Christ's deity. First, he asks, "Why do you question in your hearts?" Isn't that a great question? In contrast to the five men who had faith, Jesus reveals the true intentions of the religious leaders. They question in their hearts. This example is also a great picture of us at times. He continues by asking another question, "Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say 'Rise and walk'?" Although either is impossible for us, it's easier to say, "Your sins are forgiven," simply because who can verify it. However, Jesus then 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." Guess what happens next! Immediately, he rose. There's a lot to discuss here.

First, this is perhaps one of the most beautiful pictures of the Father's approval of his son. Here God the Father vindicates his son in front of the doubting religious leaders by

this man's healing. It was taught among Jewish teachers that God wouldn't empower sinners. In that sense, the religious leaders are left speechless, yet you can almost hear the words of the Father echoing from Jesus' baptism in Luke 3:22 "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." Through this interaction, Jesus is revealed as God in the flesh, which takes us to the key phrase of this entire passage.

In this interaction, we hear that Jesus refers to himself as the 'Son of Man for the first time in Luke's account.' Luke uses this phrase a total of 25 times throughout his gospel account, and it would seem that this is Jesus' preferred title for himself. It's a bit of a mysterious name, but upon closer examination, Jesus' use of it is nothing short of astounding. Jesus spoke Aramaic and the term 'Son of Man' was an idiom that referred to humanity in general, especially in reference to human weakness and frailty. So while the religious leaders struggled with Jesus forgiving sins, they thought nothing of him referencing himself as the Son of Man. However, we can find this title in Daniel 7:13-14.

It says, "Behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed."

The fundamental aim of Luke's Gospel is to get us to answer the question of who we believe Jesus is. These specific accounts outlined in chapter 5 all build on each other and culminate around the moment found in this story; from then on, the trajectory of Jesus' ministry changes. He has come not to heal our physical needs but our deeper spiritual needs and to heal us of our sin. Lines are being formed, decisions about Jesus are being made, blasphemy is the ultimate accusation that leads to his crucifixion, and as onlookers, we are left with how to respond to Jesus.

From this passage, there are only two options we have when it comes to Jesus. Using the title he assigns himself as the Son of Man, we can take it to mean that he is just another person, or we can take it to mean he is the man Daniel saw in his dream. To borrow from C.S. Lewis' trilemma, he is either a liar, a lunatic, or Lord. The bold claims Jesus makes about himself will not allow us to leave this question unanswered. Jesus is God found in the appearance of a man. Yes, he can relate to us in our weakness and frailty, but we mustn't give in to the temptation to minimize Jesus to a one-dimensional figure. Instead, Luke helps us see Christ's Deity beyond his mere humanity that this is the God-man who has come to heal us of our sins.

How should we respond? The correct response to Jesus is modeled by the healed man and those who witnessed what Jesus did. They were seized with amazement and glorified God. Notice that nothing is said of the religious leaders after the healing occurs. When those who are filled with faith worship and glorify God, it displaces the silence of the skeptics.

So what do we learn from this passage? We know from the five men how to respond to Jesus in faith, not skepticism. We can gain a deeper understanding of who Jesus is. He is more than just a man. He is God. If we believe that, we should respond in awe and glorify God. Telling others about the salvation of Jesus should not seem unnatural to the heart that Jesus' power and forgiveness have grasped. Have we become so religious that we've lost the conviction to tell of what Jesus has done, was this Jesus thing just a phase for you or will we leave here today giving praise to God because he has healed us of our sins.