



JESUS HEALS A LEPER AND A PARALYTIC

Part 19 of Luke's Gospel: Investigating the Man Who Is God

Pastor Mark Driscoll | Luke 5:12-26 | February 28, 2010

Luke 5:12–26

¹² 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.” ¹³ And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, “I will; be clean.” And immediately the leprosy left him. ¹⁴ 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.” ¹⁵ But now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities. ¹⁶ But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray.

¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ 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, ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ And when he saw their faith, he said, “Man, your sins are forgiven you.” ²¹ And the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, saying, “Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?” ²² When Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answered them, “Why do you question in your hearts? ²³ Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Rise and walk’? ²⁴ 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.” ²⁵ And immediately he rose up before them and picked up what he had been lying on and went home, glorifying God. ²⁶ And amazement seized them all, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, “We have seen extraordinary things today.”

INTRODUCTION

All right, Mars Hill, Jesus changes lives, that’s what we are so excited about as a church. You’re going to see two examples of Jesus changing lives in Luke 5:12–26. If you’ve got a Bible, feel free to go there. You’re gonna meet a leper and a paralytic, and we’ll start with the leper.

THE PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL PAIN OF LEPROSY

Before we get into this man’s story, let me introduce you, a little bit, to leprosy. In that day, people were well aware of lepers. There were quite a few of them, and many people witnessed and/or knew lepers. In our day, it is a condition that sadly does still befall some on the earth, but most of us, in our context, probably haven’t seen it. Leprosy was a horrendously debilitating, painful skin condition. I’ll show you a few photos so you can get an appreciation of it. It starts with red open sores that become porous. This causes great discomfort and pain. You don’t want to bathe because the open sores and wounds are so incredibly painful. Over time, this also can cause serious nerve damage. And the result being that if you burn yourself while cooking or injure yourself while working, you don’t feel it. And so people could live many years. There are some ancient records of people lasting upwards of twenty years suffering continually with leprosy, but because you would hit your hand or your foot, things of that nature, eventually you’d start losing appendages and limbs, because you were numb and desensitized.

And so these are some additional modern-day photos of lepers on the earth. This is what happens when the body loses its sensitivity and its ability to touch and the nerve endings are damaged. Imagine living in this condition for years. One more example. I show that to you so you have an appreciation of the depth of suffering. Imagine the horrific suffering that comes with this condition of leprosy.

And if that was not bad enough, to make matters worse, some people thought, wrongly, that all lepers were cursed of God for sin in their life. So oftentimes, when they needed compassion, they didn’t receive it. And the truth is, there are some people in the Bible, like Uzziah, as one example, who was stricken with leprosy as judgment from God for sin. But not every leper was suffering because of God’s judgment for a particular sin in their life. Yet, some religious people who were rather cruel and judgmental and unloving, they would proclaim the lepers to, in essence, be cursed of God and beyond any mercy or kindness or hope, which made their life all the more lonely.

Imagine this is you. This is your spouse, you get married and they get leprosy. These are your children, you have children, they’re healthy and then one day you see a rash on their arm and then it begins to spread. Those who had leprosy were quarantined for health purposes. They weren’t allowed to live in the city and be in community. They couldn’t enjoy the things that we take for granted, going to the store, worshiping with God’s people, having a

meal with friends, traveling freely. They were ostracized from the community. They lived “outside of the camp” is what the Bible says; they were in exile. They couldn’t hold a job because they couldn’t be around other people. This was such a horrendous condition that you could catch it if a leper sneezed around you, so you wanted to be nowhere near a leper, and you weren’t certainly going to work in proximity to a leper, and so the lepers would live in exile. They couldn’t obtain a job, they would beg for a living. Oftentimes they depended on family and friends to select for them a third place, somewhere neutral. The family and friends would go there, they would leave money and leave food and leave supplies and then sometime later, the leper would come alone. They were always alone or they were with other lepers, filled with stench, not bathing, suffering people, horrendous condition.

The Bible speaks of this as well in Leviticus 13:45–46, “The person with such an infectious disease must wear torn clothes, let his hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of his face and cry out, ‘Unclean, unclean!’ As long as he has the infection, he remains unclean. He must live alone.” Imagine that, total isolation. “He must live outside the camp.” Commentator Godet called this the living death. This is the AIDS, Ebola, West Nile virus, bubonic plague, Black Death of its day. And it consumed your identity. If you were anywhere near other people, as you approached them, you would have to cry out your identity, “Unclean, unclean, unclean.” And the women and children would scream and everyone would run. Some ancient reports that I read in researching for the sermon said that certain religious people would actually carry rocks in their pocket just in case they were anywhere near a leper, they’d throw rocks at the leper to drive them away.

Emotionally, I want you to feel devastated for these people. This is horrendous. Their life is destroyed. They’re without any hope and there is no cure for them.

A MAN FULL OF LEPROSY

Now, knowing that, it’s amazing what Jesus does. We pick up the story in Luke 5:12–14, “While he,” Jesus, “Was in the one of cities—” So he’s in one of these areas, a gathering point in the hill country around the Sea of Galilee and the region of Galilee, and a leper’s going to come to him in a city. And this is unusual because a leper isn’t supposed to come into the city. So this leper wants to get to Jesus, is desperate to get to Jesus. So they go into the city, “Unclean, unclean.” People are running from them, cursing them out, commanding them to leave the city, fleeing their presence. These people are unkempt. They haven’t showered sometimes in maybe years, because you can’t clean skin that is that destroyed and open with sores, seeping wounds. May have already had stones thrown at him. This man desperately wants to get to Jesus, so he goes into the city looking for Jesus.

“There came a man full of leprosy.” That is a clinical medical diagnosis from the physician, Luke, who pens the book. This isn’t a man who simply recently obtained this infection. He is quote, “full of leprosy.” He has open sores on his ears and his nose and his eyelids and his lips and his fingers, his face is covered in open sores. Some ancient reports say that it could actually attack the mucus membranes so that even your eyes would fall out of your head. He’s at that state.

“And when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face.” This is utter humility, total desperation, complete reverence for Jesus. Do you think it was difficult for him to get down on his face? If his condition was as advanced as Luke indicates, he may not have had all his fingers and toes, his joints would have infected and affected. This is very painful for this man to get down on the ground. And so rather than doing so graciously and gracefully, he simply falls face down in the dirt at the feet of Jesus. To do what? To worship him. To worship him. He is worshipping Jesus before Jesus heals him. Some would come to Jesus and say, “If you will heal me, then I will worship you.” This man says, “Whether or not you heal me, I will worship you because you are worthy.” That should be our attitude toward Jesus.

And he “begged him,” the Bible says. This man is desperate. There are some of you who do not pray either because you’re self-sufficient and/or your life doesn’t have any immediately visible crisis. Some of you pray on occasion as a need arises, and some of you are desperate prayers. You beg God, because you absolutely know beyond a shadow of a doubt that apart from his grace, you are doomed, that your life is in a hopeless condition. That was this man’s condition. He was a hopeless man, apart from the grace of God, and he is a desperate prayer, not just asking Jesus, but begging him. You can hear the quiver in his voice, you can see the tears in his eyes, this man is desperate.

And here’s what he said, “Lord.” I love that. He recognizes that Jesus Christ is Lord. You’re going to see in a bit that the religious leaders do not, but the leper does. He sees that Jesus Christ is Lord. “If you will, you can make me clean.” There’s humility here in that he’s saying, “I worship you, you’re my Lord. You have the power to heal. You don’t have to, but I’m asking that you would.” That’s a humble prayer of faith. That’s a good way to pray. “I worship you, you are Lord. You can do whatever you want, but because you’re loving, I’m making my request known to you.”

JESUS TOUCHES THE LEPER

“And Jesus stretched out his hand,” and what? What did he do Mars Hill? He touched him. That’s amazing. How long do you think it had been since anyone had touched this man? It may have been years; it may have been decades. To be full of leprosy, his condition was advanced. He had been in this state for a long time. He was used to people running from him, not walking toward him. The greatest fear that others had was touching him, and what does Jesus do? Touches him. See, God comes to earth, and what he doesn’t do is simply look at this man and say, “Be clean.” He could have done that. Instead, Mars Hill, you’ve gotta see it. He touches him in the middle of the crowd and the religious leaders and all of the fans. Jesus stops his teaching, stops answering questions, and for a moment, devotes all of his attention to this desperate man. He steps forward, and you almost get the picture, at least I do, that this man’s face is on the ground, that this man is absolutely destroyed and devastated. He’s probably worried at this point that he’s put himself in a vulnerable position where the mob would come and kick him, literally to kill him or to drive him out of town. I mean, he is in a vulnerable place. Here’s a broken, desperate, leprosy man face down in the dirt, and he’s begging Jesus, “Please heal me.”

Now, what he’s expecting is a word from Jesus, and what he gets is a touch from Jesus. Jesus touches this man. He feels Jesus touch him. Friends, this

is one of the reasons, there are so many, why we love Jesus. Jesus touches those who are unclean. That's what he does. Jesus is being affectionate to this man and he's blessing this man and he's encouraging this man and he is publicly dignifying this man. Isn't that amazing?

See, the religious leaders in that day, they actually had a rule: You cannot touch someone who has leprosy, if you do, you will be ceremonially, ritually, religiously unclean. That wasn't a rule in the Bible, that was a rule that the religious people made and Jesus says, "No. I love him. I'm identifying myself with him. He needs touch." Touch is such an amazing gift. Those who are child development psychologists they will tell you that without touch, a human being actually doesn't develop, mature or live. If you raise a child in isolation, they die. Same with human beings in general, if they live in isolation, they die. It's not good to be alone. This man's been alone for years and his new life begins when Jesus touches him as a friend. How amazing is that? And we, as the church, get to be the proverbial body of Christ and that we get to reach out and touch hurting, broken, desperate, needy, unclean people with the love of Jesus. It's amazing. It's amazing. All week I've just been thinking about Jesus embracing this man. I literally, I can't get over it, how wonderful that is.

The story continues. Jesus says, "I will; be clean." Touches him, he says, "I will heal you; be clean." And what Mars Hill? "Immediately the leprosy left him." His skin was immediately healed. I don't know if he got fingers and toes back, I don't know what happened, but immediately he was healed. "And the leprosy left him. And he charged him to tell no one." Isn't that amazing? Jesus is gonna tell this guy, "Don't tell anyone." He tells everyone, all right. Jesus rises from death, tells us, "Tell everyone." We don't tell anyone. It's amazing how upside down it all is.

LEVITICUS 14

"Jesus 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.'" What he's referring to here, when he mentions Moses, is the Old Testament. The first five books were written by Moses. And here Jesus is going back to Leviticus 14. Now, Jesus ignores, rightly, all of the goofy religious rules that aren't in the Bible, but he obeys everything that's in the Scriptures. And here he tells the man, "You've been healed, now you need to obey the Bible." So if you want to study this on your own, it might be interesting for you. Leviticus 14 gives detailed instructions for someone who has experienced an alleged healing from leprosy.

And here's how it would go, I'll give the summary. The leper would schedule an appointment with the priest—the leader and spiritual intercessor and mediator between God and the people—and they would meet in a third place outside of the city, outside of the camp, and the priest would come to verify the healing of the leper. And if the leper had, in fact, been healed, the priest would serve to function, basically, as the medical doctor of that community in that capacity and declare a healing. And then what would happen would be, if someone was, in fact, healed from leprosy, two birds would be taken, one would be sacrificed and the other would be set free. All of this happened over a bowl of clean water showing that it is God, by his grace, that cleanses. And this is like what was called Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement or the Day, it was the high holy day in the nation of Israel. And two goats would be brought into the temple, and the priest, again, serving as the intercessor and the mediator and the advocate and representative of the people, would name the sins over one goat and then slaughter it as a substitute, and then name the sins over the other goat and then send it away as the scapegoat. So there was the sacrificial goat and the scapegoat, that you're forgiven and your sins are taken away.

And the same kind of thing would happen here where, instead of two goats it was two birds, and two birds would be brought and one would be sacrificed and the other would be set free, showing that through the shedding of blood—ultimately foreshadowing the coming of Jesus and his death in our place for our sins on the cross—our sins would be forgiven, and the other dove's sent away, showing that Jesus takes our sin away.

And then what would happen is that the person would have to bathe, 'cause they hadn't had a bath in a long time. They would be shaved. Usually they had long, scraggly hair, they were not kempt. And they would be shaved, and they would shave their whole body, including their eyebrows. And what they would say then is, "You're like a baby. You've been born-again. God has given you a brand-new life." Sort of like when you become a Christian.

And then what would happen is they would be allowed to meet with people again, so there would be a week-long party. Could you imagine that for this man? If he was married when he got leprosy, he hasn't seen his wife in years, hasn't held her hand, hasn't snuggled with her. If he was a daddy when he got leprosy, he hasn't been able to see his children grow up in years. He's not had dinner at anyone's home. He's not hugged anyone. He's not been invited to a party. He's not sat down to eat a meal with anyone. It's been years, like I said, maybe decades. And now word goes back to the people, "He's healed. God did a miracle. His leprosy's gone. Praise God, let's throw a huge party," and it was a one-week-long party. And they would celebrate and he'd tell the story of God's grace and catch up with everyone and "What's God been doing in your life and how are things going and what have I missed?" This is like someone who's been in a coma for years and comes out of it, they have so much catching up to do. And then at the end of that week-long celebration, they would bathe yet again, and they would shave yet again, showing full and total healing and cleansing and forgiveness. And then the priest would take three lambs and offer three lambs for sacrifice. And these are lambs without spot or blemish.

All of this is foreshadowing the coming of Jesus. When Jesus begins his ministry, it's John the Baptizer, his cousin, who says, "Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." In 1 Peter 1 we are told that Jesus is quote, "A lamb without spot or blemish." And I'll double check to get this right, one was for a guilt offering, one for a sin offering and one for a burnt offering to make up for all the years of missed worshipful sacrifices. And their sin was dealt with through this offering of an unblemished lamb, showing that ultimately Jesus is coming and he's going to take care of us. And then the priest would do a most interesting thing, again, you can read all of this in Leviticus 14. He would take some of the blood and he'd place it on the man's ear and on his thumb and on his big toe. Why? You belong to God now, listen to him. You belong to God now, serve him. You belong to God now. Walk in his ways. That's what it meant. That's exactly what life is supposed to be. Jesus sheds his blood so that we can be forgiven and cleansed, and now that we belong to him, we should listen to him, serve him, follow him.

THE DOCTRINE OF EXPIATION: JESUS MAKES US CLEAN

Now, let me make this personal for us, otherwise what we can do is simply read the story and say, "That's amazing that Jesus did that for that man" and we rejoice in that, but you could miss the fullness of what is happening here, because sometimes God will use a physical healing to teach a spiritual truth, and that's the case here. In Isaiah 1:4-6, written about seven hundred years before Jesus was born, God used leprosy as an analogy for sin. What he says is: People are sinful and they're unclean and filthy like lepers. It's a condition that is deep. It's a condition that is incurable. It is a condition that makes you insensitive. It is a condition that causes you to live separated from God, outside of the proverbial camp. It is a condition that, ultimately, will lead to your death. And God says that we're all sinners by nature and choice, that because of our sin, we're in the same position as the leper. Some of you say, "I don't believe that, I don't think I'm as disgusting as a leper." And it's because the earth is one big leper colony and since there's nothing but lepers here, we don't get as disgusted by it as God does. And so God comes to earth as the man Jesus Christ, and in seeing sin, he has the same repulsion and reaction as you and I would to someone who is a person full of leprosy. If you and I were to see someone full of leprosy, we would recoil and say, "That is unfortunate, and that is grotesque." And when Jesus looks at sin, it is grotesque to him, as leprosy is to us. And what does he do? He touches us. That's what he does.

See, some of you would hear this and you would say, "Unclean, that's me." Some of you, because of sin you've committed, some of you have done some very filthy, dirty, nasty, vile things, very gross. You should walk in saying, "Unclean, unclean." Some of you have had very disgusting, nasty, vile, grotesque things done to you. You've been abused, raped, molested, cheated on, lied to, betrayed, taken advantage of, and you just feel dirty and filthy, and you feel as if your identity is unclean, unclean. And the truth is that Jesus cleanses and that he puts a hand on us too, just like he did the leper. If you ask Jesus, "Would you please heal me and cleanse me?" He would say, as he said to this man, "I will, be clean. Be clean." We call this the biblical doctrine of expiation, that Jesus makes us clean. Mars Hill, in Christ you are clean. You're clean. That's why the church always gets to wear white in the Bible, you're clean. That's why if we confess our sins, he will both forgive us and cleanse us of our unrighteousness, that's what the Bible says. In Christ, you're clean. You're not an alcoholic, you're not a drug addict. You're not a whore, you're not a fornicator. You're not an adulterer. Those are things you've done, but in Christ you're made clean. By the power of the Holy Spirit, you're cleansed. To what? To commission your ear, your thumb and your toe to God and say, "From now on, I listen to him, I serve him, I walk with him." No longer unclean. Your identity's changed. Jesus, in touching this man, does the same as he does for us. He takes his filth away, he gives his dignity back, and the man gets a brand-new identity to go live a new life as if he was reborn. That's what Jesus gives.

If you're here and you're not a Christian, you may not know this. You may have thought that all Christianity is, is guilt. We just remind you all the time of all the things you do wrong. No, we remind you of all the things you do wrong, then we remind you of all the things that Jesus does right, and we remind you of the love of Jesus that forgives sin and cleanses, so you can be happy and go live a new life. It doesn't end with guilt, it ends with joy. This man got to party for a week. That's the result of a right understanding of the work of Jesus. That's amazing that Jesus would do that. A new identity as a clean person.

JESUS RESTS AND RECOVERS WITH THE FATHER

Now how is Jesus going to respond to this? Luke 5:15-16, "But now even more the report "about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities." As soon as word got out, "Hey, this guy Jesus, he heals lepers with no co-pay, no deductible, no two-day follow up." The line got really long. "Really? I'm in." So what is Jesus going to do? Is he going to pour himself out twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year? No, he does something very unexpected. "He would withdraw to desolate places and pray." The New International Version of the Bible says, "Jesus often withdrew to lonely places to pray or be alone with the Father." So the line gets long and Jesus leaves town.

Now, for those who were in line, I'm sure this seemed cruel. "Why did he didn't get healed? How come I get healed? He's no better than I am." "Hey, where did Jesus go?" It's not like there's a lot of people who can heal lepers. "I've been waiting in line for two days." It would appear, perhaps, that Jesus is being unkind, unpleasant, uncaring. He's not. He's doing exactly what the Father has called him to do, not everything that he could possibly do, but everything that he is called to do. And see, when God became a man, he took upon himself certain limitations. He did this to humbly identify with us. So Jesus needs to eat and he needs to get some sleep and he needs to get a day off and he needs to drink some water, otherwise he's gonna die. He can't just be healing people twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, so he has to manage, not just his time, but his energy. You need to remember that. So much of our world is about time management, it should be also primarily about energy management. Jesus here has poured himself out. He's been preaching and teaching, healing people, casting out demons and curing lepers. That's what we've read in the previous sections of Luke's gospel. And you know what he is? He's tired. And it's not that there are not people who need him, it's that he has nothing left to give. He's emptied his bucket, and he's gotta go get with the Father to have it filled back up.

Now, I'll tell you how this works physiologically. When you're on, when you're busy, when you're doing something, like I am, you feel strong and powerful and alert and focused. Why? Because your body is producing adrenaline and cortisol. You're strong and moving, and so you ride that adrenaline and cortisol until you crash. Now what happens then, you have one of two options: You accept your limitations and you do what Jesus did and you unplug and you go be with the Father and get your day off and pray and rest and recover; or you do what I did for a decade, and you drink energy drinks and caffeine and carbohydrates and sugar and you combine that with stubbornness and you keep going. I'm not saying you should do that, I'm saying that's what I did. And I did that until I fried out my adrenal glands and really put myself in a very precarious position, health-wise, a few years ago. And what happens is, some of you are workaholics and you're not addicted to the work, you're addicted to the high, 'cause it feels good to be going, and then there's always a reaction. So if you push hard, you crash hard. You get depressed, easily tempted, grumpy, low energy, mental fogginess, you don't like that. So you push again to turn the adrenal glands back on, kick up the cortisol production and push through to keep going, until eventually you break all at once. This is where you have panic attack, heart attack, some sort of physical breaking point at the weak spot in your particular anatomy, major depression, self-medicating with drugs, alcohol, sex, pornography, shopping.

Jesus doesn't do any of those things. Today the psychologists, the psychiatrists, the sociologists, the medical doctors, they will say that if you pour yourself out, expect to be depleted and the best thing to do is to get silence and solitude. Really? I know a guy who did that. Oh, his name's Jesus. We should probably do what he did. Isn't that amazing that 2,000 years later the doctors are basically saying, "Ah, do what Jesus did." See, 'cause Jesus knew what he was doing, he had wisdom from the Holy Spirit. So he poured himself out, and when the bucket was empty, he went to get it refilled with the Father. And I'm sure everybody was asking, "Hey Jesus, what about your 2 o'clock appointment? People are stacked up here." Jesus says, "I'll be back later." When? "When the bucket's full, and I'll give you what I got." But this was Jesus' habitual practice to get alone with the Father.

JESUS TOOK CARE OF THE LEPER AND HIMSELF

Now, let me say this: All of you need to be aware of this; all of you need to be aware of this, that if you don't pay attention to your body and you're not willing to live within the limitations that God gave you, you will not have the prolonged productivity that Jesus did. So that's true for all of us, but especially four kinds of people, in my pastoral experience.

1. INTENSE PEOPLE

Number one: Those people who are intense. Any of you intense? I don't have a graduated spectrum, I have on and off, right, that's it. Some of you, you're like, "I'm going out at 25%." God bless you, help me. I don't even know how do that. To me, it was like, "I'm gonna write a book," so I wrote six in a year, all right? It's like, "Hey, everything fell down in Haiti, I'm gonna go there." You know, some of us are a little intense. We can't do something, we have to do it all. So people like that, you gotta be very careful, if you're like me, what you actually commit yourself to, 'cause it's all or nothing, which means when you go hard for something, you're gonna be done at the end 'cause you're gonna leave it all on the field, you're not gonna leave anything back.

2. CAREGIVERS

Number two: You need to be careful if you're a caretaker, you're a counselor, you're a caseworker, you're a foster parent, you work in hospice, you're a nurse, you're a doctor, you're a drug treatment counselor, right, you're an EMT. You're a caregiver. Your job is to pour yourself out to help hurting people. Your bucket's gonna get empty all the time.

3. HIGH-CAPACITY LEADERS

Number three: Those of you who are high-capacity leaders like Jesus, the needs are never ending, you could work twenty-four hours a day, and that wouldn't even begin to take care of all the needs.

4. PEOPLE WITH SMALL EMOTIONAL BUCKETS

And number four: Those of you who are just people with small emotional buckets, you don't have a big bucket. It doesn't take a lot to empty it out. Those kinds of people are particularly susceptible to burn out and to depression, and to physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually breaking.

And the younger you are, the less you believe it. You just feel like, "I got this red cape and this 'S' on my chest, I feel great." That's the adrenaline, all right, you're temporarily insane, okay? And so, I love this about Jesus, he takes care not only of the leper, but himself. You notice that? He takes care of the leper and himself. That was very convicting for me this week studying this, 'cause most of the pastors I know, myself included, not in the best shape, push it too hard, work too many hours, skip the day off, why? "I'm helping hurting people," and you're hurting yourself. Many ministry leaders are the least healthy of all.

And I would give this to our community group leaders, our service team leads, our deacons, our elders, the givers in this church, those who pour themselves out like Jesus. He took care of the lepers and himself, and he didn't feel guilty about that. That amazes me. He worked from conviction, not guilt. Guilt comes from people, conviction comes from the Lord. So I want to give you permission to pour yourself out for people and take care of yourself, Jesus does both.

So he transforms the leper's life. He also takes care of himself, and then he's going to have a little more energy left to pour himself out to serve the paralytic. He's not done, all right, he's unplugging from work to plug back into the Father and then he's gonna plug back into ministry.

THE PHARISEES

So we pick up the story of the paralytic in Luke 5:17-19. "On one of those days, he was teaching." So we see that Jesus' ministry is teaching, preaching, casting out demons, healing the sick. The "Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there." Okay, we're gonna talk about these guys. You'll see a little further down, it's probably the scribes. So it's the Pharisees and the scribes. They're gonna appear a lot in Luke's gospel. They're predominant in the gospel. The most stinging renunciation of these people is in Matthew 23. In the next section of Luke, we're going to deal at length with the Pharisees and the scribes, but let me introduce you to them today since they figure prominently here, and they make reappearing cameos throughout the course of the book.

Now, they started with a good idea, that is: "We want people to obey the Bible." That's a good idea. Like if we were gonna vote for that, I would hope that you would vote yes. If I came to you and said, "How many of you want people to obey the Bible?" "Yes." "Okay, you're a Pharisee." Now, wait a minute, not exactly, right? How did they get from a good thing to a Pharisee? And if you don't know, Pharisee's a bad thing. These are the religious guys. They actually are complicit in the murder of Jesus. They are his archenemies, that's the Pharisees.

Well, they started with a good idea, but they had the wrong answer. They made it about what we do, not about what Jesus does. They made it about their

“perfect” life, not Jesus’ perfect life. They made it about our works, not God’s grace. They got it all wrong. They became religious. Now, the scribes were the professional, formerly trained theologians. So these are guys that went to Bible college and seminary. They have degrees after their name, big libraries, they publish books. You know, they’re respected because these are the highly trained professionals. And the Pharisees were the middle class, not formerly educated group of people that would collect themselves into closed communities, and one group of Pharisees would be under one scribe, sort of their resident expert theologian. So, you know, think, guy with a beard and a couple degrees and all his Facebook friends, all right, that’s what we’re looking at. And the Pharisees then would try and enforce all the rules and laws that their scribe made, but being working class and not having a great education, they were obedient to the point of blindness. And the result was they became very powerful, particularly after the temple’s destroyed in 70 A.D. They became one of the, if not the strongest voices in all of Judaism, very powerful.

“And they came from every village of Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem,” the big city where all the big scholars live. So Jesus now has gotten famous, his teaching has gotten out, and everybody’s coming to listen, and now the scribes and the Pharisees are there, and Jesus is going to teach, and they’re all sitting in the front row, laptops open, looking for free Wi-Fi, ready to live blog and Twitter this thing and figure out what Jesus thinks and give their opinion to the world.

“And the power of the Lord was with him,” that’s Jesus, “to heal.” The other guys had a theology of healing, Jesus had people he healed. He had a totally different level of authority and 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 their midst before Jesus.” This is a great story. Jesus is teaching in a home. It’s like a community group, but Jesus shows up to your community group. That’s a great day. And all of a sudden, your community group’s really big; it really grew. House is full and, of course, who takes all the front-row seats? All the religious people, all the Bible college and seminary guys. They take all the first row. They’re not even in your group, they just showed up and made it their own. And then there’s everybody else, and then there’s a bunch of people who can’t even get in the house, so they’re outside listening.

And there’s this guy who’s a paralytic. He’s totally paralyzed and his friends get a cot and they carry him and they get to the house and they’re like, “We can’t get our friend to Jesus.” Why? Because people are in the way, especially the religious people. I think it’s amazing that you want to get a hurting person to Jesus and it’s religious people who are in the way. Some things never change. And so these guys are so determined to get their buddy to Jesus, they go up on the roof and they start dismantling it. Don’t do this to your community group leader. They start dismantling the roof, and they’ve got it all figured out. “All right, we got some ropes and we’re gonna put it on the cot and we’re gonna bring this guy down and we’re drop him right in front of Jesus.” And they drop him right in front of Jesus, which is like, there’s no way he can ignore this request, all right? And there he is the paralytic guy, “Hi Jesus, I’m paralyzed.” It’s a pretty funny moment, I think. It’s like “Cirque du Jesus,” here he comes, you know like—

WHAT ARE YOU WILLING TO DO TO BRING YOUR FRIENDS TO JESUS?

And here’s my question, what are you willing to do to bring your friend to Jesus? These guys so want their friend to get to Jesus, they go out of their way. They get a cot, they carry him. They climb up on the roof, they dismantle the roof, and they lower him down. These are guys who really want to get their friend to Jesus. Statistically, at things like evangelistic rallies and crusades, Billy Graham type stuff, about three-fourths of the people who actually give their lives to Jesus were brought by a Christian. You know what it is? It’s Christians bringing their non-Christian friends, family, coworkers, neighbors. And some of you, you know people who don’t know Jesus and you need to bring them to Jesus and the question is, what are you willing to do to make that happen? Have you even invited them to church, community group, have you bought them a Bible, have you bought them a book, have you brought them a meal? Some of you say, “I’ve invited them, but they never come.” Go pick them up, ‘cause non-Christians will make excuses like, “Well, I forgot.” Honk, honk. “Well, I didn’t know where it was.” “I know where it is, I’ll come get you. I’ll bring a muffin and coffee, I’ll smile. I’m not gonna do this in a mean way. After we’re done, I’ll buy you something to eat. Oh, here’s a Bible with your name on it, you know, I love you.” What are you willing to do to bring your friends to Jesus? Friends, that’s what God is asking of us all. People need Jesus and it is our great privilege to bring them to him, and there’s always going to be an obstacle. The question is are you gonna be creative and resilient enough to get around that obstacle and to find a way to get them to Jesus. And his friends do this, these are great friends, these are great friends. They get him to Jesus.

Now, let me say this, what’s going to happen now is Jesus is going to heal him, and we’ll get into that in a moment, and the Pharisees and the scribes, rather than rejoicing, they start criticizing. So let me explain their mindset to you, and then we’ll get back into the story. Pharisee literally means “separated one,” “one who’s separated.” And their ideology was that sin is caught like leprosy. They don’t understand that sin is in us, not out there. Sin is out there, but the real problem with sin is in me, and so what they would think is “Oh, we’re clean, they’re unclean. We’re the holy guys, they’re the unholy guys, so we can’t be near them, ‘cause we’ll catch their sin.” That’s what they thought. That’s what religious people always think. So then what they did is they took the Bible and they made additional rules alongside of the Bible, so they said, “Well, if you don’t want to get near sinners and their sin, obey the rules in the Bible and all these additional rules that we have made.” And religious people love their rules. They have rules about the rules, that’s religious people.

And what I find very interesting here as well is that these religious people don’t do anything to help this man. He gets lowered down. They don’t jump up—first they don’t say, “Hey, you know what? We should step aside so that the paralytic man could get to Jesus.” No, they don’t. They’re so worried about finding anything Jesus would say that they would disagree with so that they could criticize him that they’re completely oblivious to the fact that they’re surrounded with hurting and needy people. That’s the way religious people are. They come not to learn, they come to argue. I would ask you that: do you come to learn or do you come to argue? Some people just have that critical disposition, that pharisaical attitude which is, “I’m always right, there’s always something wrong, and it’s my job to find it and criticize it. I’m not here to learn, I’m here to critique.” They’re completely oblivious to the hurting and needy people around them.

Furthermore, Jesus is going to help this man. They don't do anything. They don't pray for him, they don't help him, they don't do anything. Religious people tend to criticize those who are helping rather than helping, and they do the same thing tragically with Jesus.

THERE IS A LITTLE PHARISEE IN US ALL

Now, as I unpack the Pharisees, let me say this, there's a little Pharisee in us all. There is a bit of religion in each of us. Martin Luther says, rightly, that religion is the default mode of the human heart. And at Mars Hill, our religion is being irreligious. That's our religion. We're like, "Oh, well we got, you know, tattoos, we got a punk rock band. Half our church has a smoke break. Alcohol's fine. Praise God, we're not religious." No, we are, we're just tattooed, chain smoking, beer-drinking religious people. That's all we are. We're just our own happier version, to be sure, but our own version nonetheless. And so we've always gotta be careful to say, you know what? It's not like there's religious people and irreligious people. We're all religious people, we just have different rules on our list, so you gotta be very careful, 'cause we're all religious. That's the default mode of the human heart.

RELIGIOUS SEPARATISM

And where this religion, I think, is most clearly seen in our day is in Christian Fundamentalism. And the whole point is separation. "Don't watch TV." "Why?" "It's got sin on it." "Yeah, it does. The Bible's got sin in it too, so I don't know what to do with that." "Don't read it, people do nasty things." "Yeah, okay, all right." "Don't listen to the radio." "Why?" "People say things on there that are not nice." "Okay." "Don't have any non-Christian friends, don't let your kids have any non-Christian friends. Don't listen to any non-Christian music, don't watch any non-Christian shows. Don't read any non-Christian books." "Why?" "Because they're the bad guys, we're the good guys, we don't want to get all dirty." Religion, separatism.

Fundamentalists actually create something called three degrees of separation, okay? You're gonna see this in the coming weeks. The religious people, in that day, they practice separation too. So they look at Jesus, they're like, "What are you doing eating with those guys?" Jesus is like, "Well, they're sinners." They're like, "Yeah, we know. You're gonna catch it." He's like, "Uh, no, I'm gonna fix it. That's what I do." And so, you'll see that they freak out on Jesus all the time, because he's friends with people who are not the good guys. And the truth is the Bible's all bad guys, Jesus is the good guy. There's not a team of good guys, there's one good guy. And what happens is religious people, not only don't want "holy people"—and I use that word in quotes very loosely with a sense of irony—they don't want holy people to hang out with unholy people. And so Christian Fundamentalists even go a step further and say, "We have three degrees of separation, which means holy people can't hang out with holy people that hang out with unholy people." Which means you can't even have a friend who's a friend of an unholy person.

Yet Jesus obliterates all this, God becomes a man and he goes down and touches lepers and has dinner with sinners. Does he sin? No. But he breaks all the religious rules. Does he break any of the Bible rules? None of them, none of them, but he breaks a lot of the religious rules. And so Jesus is always calling sinners to repent of sin and religious people to repent of religion. And ultimately, a lot of the sinners want to have dinner with him and the religious people shout, "Crucify him." We need to be very careful that if we're zealous and we love the Bible and we're passionate and we're devoted that we don't end up being pharisaical and religious, 'cause they started with a good idea: We want to be serious about the Bible.

And there are some ways that they got off track. I'll share them with you, and then we'll close the story.

1. PROUD

Number one: They were proud. They were proud. "We're the good guys, you're the bad guys. "We have the answers, you have the questions. We have the solutions, you have the problems." And here is where their error of pride got them: "The Bible is perfect and so is my interpretation." "The Bible is perfect and so is my teacher." Just so you know this, the Bible is perfect, your pastor's not. Inerrancy doesn't extend to Bible teachers, and what invariably happens, people will put somebody in a position of a scribe saying, "Look, you're the authority, you study it, you walk with God, you get stuff done. Whatever you say, that must be true." No, the Bible's true and we who are gifted and graced of God to be Bible teachers, we do our best but we're not perfect, not because we don't love God, but because we're not God. So be very careful if there's any author you read, any publisher you love, any confession of faith that you adore, any systematic theology that you embrace that you don't see anything in it that you disagree with. You're in trouble, 'cause now you've extended inerrancy outside of Scripture and you've extended inerrancy to fallible human teachers. It's pride.

I asked one guy recently, he was arguing with me about a more fundamental religious kind of teacher and he kept quoting this guy. I didn't hear a lot of verses, I heard a lot of quotes. "Well, you know, scholar such and such says, blank." I finally looked at him I say, "Is there anything this guy's ever taught that you disagree with?" He says, "No, he teaches the Bible." "I'm sure he got something wrong. It's a huge book. There's a lot in there." And it doesn't mean that you gotta come with an attitude of critic, but you come saying, "That's not Jesus, that's one of his servants and those messages are not Bible, they're commentary on it."

2. CESSATIONISTS

Number two: Cessationists. Now, we believe that the Holy Spirit is alive and active today, that God's the same yesterday, today, and forever. We believe that the Holy Spirit will convict you of sin, reveal to you Jesus, lead you and guide you, work through your conscience and God's people to help course correct your life. And what religious like to do is assume that the Holy Spirit has ceased his work. "You don't need the Holy Spirit to convict you of sin, we'll take care of that. You don't need the Holy Spirit to teach you, we'll take care of that. You don't need the Holy Spirit to lead you and guide you, we'll just tell you what to do. You don't need the Holy Spirit really for anything, just obey the spiritual leader." It's horrendous. It replaces the Holy Spirit's ministry in your life with a religious spiritual leader. It's very ungodly. That's why those who are the most religious are sometimes the most opposed to the personal ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer. "We can't trust the Holy Spirit, trust the teacher," and so

then the teacher will sometimes even cause you to doubt the power and presence and person of the Holy Spirit. It's horrible.

3. UNLOVING

Number three: It ends up being unloving. Jesus rebukes these guys for it all the time. "You're not loving," and then they want to argue what loves means, "Well, what does love—?" And they go off into theology land and live in their head rather than saying, "I'm a jerk. I'm a jerk. I'm mean. I judge people, I criticize people. I don't love people, I don't serve people. I live in my head. I turn everything into a theological argument." Unloving. Did you know that people flocked to Jesus in a way that they didn't flock to Pharisees? Did you know that people wanted to have dinner with Jesus in a way that they didn't want to have dinner with the Pharisees? It's 'cause Jesus was loving. He actually cared about people.

4. HYPOCRITICAL

Number four: They were hypocritical. Jesus is clear on this repeatedly, again, Matthew 23 is a great place to read. What he'd say is, "You guys have a list of rules that you enforce on everyone like the sheriff, you don't even obey your own rules." This is what religious people do. I mean, how many of you have wanted to vomit when some hard-core Bible thumper, it's like, and he had an adulteress affair or he's a drug addict. You're like, "Come on. Seriously? Again? Come on." Do we need any more hypocrisy? Come on, you preach one thing, do another, that doesn't help the cause. It's hypocrisy. It's because they think they're the hero, not Jesus, and they start acting as if they are beyond the law, and they're not. And that hypocrisy, it really turns off non-Christians, becomes disdainful. Jesus rebukes them for this. "You guys are hypocrites, man, a bunch of hypocrites."

You know, I was recently dealing with a pastor. He and his elder board were disciplining another pastor in the church, this is a friend of mine, for committing adultery and the whole time they were disciplining that pastor for committing adultery, another pastor who was part of the discipline process was also having adultery and sitting in on the meeting and saying, "I can't believe you did that, man, that's gross," and then he's doing it. That's as religious as it gets.

5. JOYLESS

Number five: It's joyless, it's not fun. Fundamentalism is not fun, it's mental, but not fun. It's not fun. How many religious people, you're like, "Man, those are some happy people?" No, furrowed brow, loaded gun, these are not happy people. They're defined by what they're against. They're always railing against something. They're always upset at somebody. They're not fun at all. That's why their kids, as soon as they can, they leave and they rebel and they go sin, 'cause at least that looks fun. They're joyless. See, Jesus was—he had sorrow, but he was also joyful.

6. METHODOLATRY

Number six: They have what I call methodolatry. I make words up, that's one of them. The Bible gives us principles and methods and the principles are unchanging and the methods are changing and idolatry happens when you take your method and you turn it into an idol. It's methodolatry, which is: The Bible says to do something and "There's only way do it and that's our way." So the Bible says to worship God, religious people say, "Like this, sing these songs with these instruments in this order." The Bible says Ephesians 6, raise your kids, train them. "Well, you gotta school them in this way, this kind of education." The Bible says to preach, study, memorize the word and they say, "But there's only one translation." All right, it's always something. It's methodolatry. Have deep, passionate convictions. Have methods but hold the principle tightly, hold the method loosely. Don't commit methodolatry. "It's my way or you're not biblical." Some people love God and they believe the Bible. They're from different denominations and traditions. They're not from our or your sect or team or tribe or style, but if they love Jesus, believe the Bible and they're acting out the principles, we shouldn't be like the Pharisees saying, "I don't know about them, let's be separated." They're family. Praise God for the diversity. Praise God for the diversity, and avoid the methodolatry.

7. POWERFUL

And number seven: These people are very powerful, why? They're bold, they're confident. They just rattle off verses like *Jeopardy*. All right, they've memorized a lot of verses. You're like, "I don't know, they sound biblical. They're serious, they're confident, they seem to be bold. It seems like they're willing to die on every hill. There's a lot of them and they swarm you like bees, maybe they're right." No, you can be zealous and wrong. You can be biblical and unbiblical, meaning you quote verses but you're not using them like God intends, and that's religious people.

JESUS SAYS HE IS GOD

So here's what's gonna happen, Jesus is gonna have a showdown, the first of many, with the religious people. Again, back to the story, the friends bring this paralytic guy to Jesus. He's dropped in front of Jesus. Luke 5:20–22, we read this, "And when he saw their faith, he said, 'Man, your sins are forgiven you.'" That's a big statement. No other religious leader says this; Mohammed, Krishna, Buddha. They don't say, "Your sins are forgiven." They say, "We've uncovered this process by which you can go through these rituals and routines and sufferings and potential reincarnations and pay God back, and maybe someday he will forgive you if you earn it." It's a big process. Here Jesus says, "Forgiven. I can just forgive."

Now, somehow this man's injury and his sin are connected. I don't know how, but I'll give you one potential example of what this might look like. He's a paralytic who's sinned. There was a guy early on in Mars Hill, he walked in and this guy didn't really have use of most of his fingers. He had previously been a locksmith. His arms were all contorted and he had nerve damage. He walked with permanent crutches and his knees would buckle and he walked on one ankle and he shook a lot and he often fell over. He was in bad shape, physically destroyed, and I would visit him at his house, pretty much every week, pick him up, take him to church, got to know him. He met Jesus, got saved, got baptized. He's moved out of state since then, he sent me a letter recently. Still loves Jesus, walking faithfully as a Christian, but one day I finally asked him, what happened? Were you born like this or did something happen? And he said, "Before I met Jesus, I'm drinking and partying and messin' around and livin' a reckless life. I'm going like a hundred

miles an hour on a motorcycle, and I miss a turn in the road and I fly into a telephone pole. And I broke almost every bone in my body and I was in the hospital for months and nothing's worked right since." He's a man whose body is destroyed, but it's because of his sin. He's not a victim, he can't sue anyone. He wasn't born like that. He did it to himself. Some of you here are like that, you've just wrecked your whole life. You just ran it right into a telephone pole. You say, "Yeah, everything about me is just broken, but it's my fault, I did it." That's this guy.

"And the scribes and the Pharisees began to question saying, 'Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins by God alone?'" Here's their deal, what they don't say is, "Wow, that was cool. He's gonna be healed. Yes!" Instead they're like, "What's the theological presupposition behind this healing?" They just totally go Bible college, first year, home schooled, neatnik, weird kid on Jesus, that's how they go. And here's the thing, when we sin, we sin against people and God, so we gotta apologize to people and God. That's what repentance is. And Jesus says, "I'm gonna forgive this guy." And they say, "Blasphemy, you're saying you're God." And the point is "Yeah, I know. That's the big 'E' on the eye chart I'm trying to communicate. I'm God."

Now, some of you have been told Jesus never said he was God. He repeatedly says he's God in a lot of different ways, this is one of them. Psalm 51:4, "Against you only, Lord, have I sinned." We sin against God, so who has to forgive us? God. Jesus says, "I'll forgive you." What's he saying? "I'm God."

"When Jesus perceived their thoughts," you'd think at that point they'd start to rethink their position. "You're not God!" "I know what you're thinking." "Really? That's a real point in your column, all right, like, you know my thoughts." Seriously? "When Jesus perceived their thoughts, 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?'" Here's what he's saying. "If I just tell this guy his sins are forgiven, you won't know, 'cause that's an invisible spiritual transaction. But if I also tell him, 'Your sins are forgiven, walk. I forgive your sin and I heal the paralyzation that's come upon you as a result of your sin,' then that's evidence that I'm God." And you know what? He does it. He does it.

JESUS FORGIVES SIN

Jesus, let me tell ya this, Jesus forgives sin. You're not gonna find another religion that will forgive your sin. Every other religion is about you obeying somebody's stupid list of ridiculous rules in an effort to make God love you. Jesus loves you unconditionally by grace and he just forgives you. That's why we're so into Jesus. Jesus is so much better than religion. Some of you would come here and you'd say, "I feel unclean like the leper and I feel guilty like the paralytic. What should I do?" Answer, Jesus touches to cleanse and he forgives. He does the work of salvation. This is our Jesus. This is why we're so excited about him, at least, I am.

Now, the story continues then, Luke 5:24–26. Jesus says, "But that you may know that the Son of Man—" This is Jesus' favorite title for himself. It's taken from Daniel 7:13–14; it is that God the Father and the Son of God, the Son of Man, they are together in eternity past and Jesus the Son of Man, the Son of God, comes into human history to conquer sin, to liberate people and to establish his unending forever kingdom. This is a majestic claim to deity. Jesus is saying, "I'm God become a man." He says it twenty-five times in Luke, eighty-three times in the gospels, his favorite authority title. "And authority on earth to forgive sins," he says. "He said to the man who was paralyzed, 'I say to you,'" his own authority, "'Pick up your bed and go home.' And immediately he rose up before them and picked up what he had been lying on and he went home, glorifying God." What a great day! "I was carried here on a stretcher, I'm carrying the stretcher home." That's a good day. "And amazement seized them all." Never seen anything like this, "And they glorified God and were filled with awe." That's worship. They're shouting praises to Jesus, saying, "We have seen extraordinary things today."

Some of you would come here and you are unclean. You are filthy, you are dirty like the leper and Jesus would reach out and touch you and say, "You're clean, in me, you're clean. I took all your sin, went to the cross, suffered and died in your place for your sins to give you my righteousness. You're clean. New identity. Stop saying, I'm unclean. Stop saying, I'm unworthy. Stop saying, I'm filthy and defiled." You're clean. Go home take a shower. Every time you take a shower, remind yourself, "In Christ, I'm clean." Every time you wear white remind yourself, "In Christ, I'm clean. I don't need to say, 'Unclean, unclean.' In Christ I've been made clean." And next time you do sin and when you are sinned against and you do feel filthy and dirty and defiled, you go back to Jesus and he'll touch you again and he'll declare you clean. And for those of you who are coming and you're not just filthy, you're guilty. You've done horrible things. You're a total sinner. You've wrapped your whole life around the pole. You have blown it yourself, you have no one to sue, no one to blame, it's all on you. You know what? Jesus forgives. He just does. He's not like religious people giving you a list to do. He's a God who comes to live and to die and to rise and to give forgiveness. That's what he does. We haven't gotten over this. Two thousand years, people are still filled with awe, glorifying God. "You're serious, this is who God is, this is how he works, you have to be kidding me?"

And the default mode of the religious heart is always to find something wrong, something to criticize, to come with an attitude and a disposition of a critic rather than, like the leper, just say, "I'm gonna throw myself at Jesus' feet. I'm gonna cry out for mercy and I'm gonna let him touch me and heal me. I'm gonna let him forgive me, and I'm gonna run home and be happy. That's what I'm gonna do." That's what I want for y'all, and that's exactly what happens for this guy.

Now, the religious people don't get it. They're over in the corner. "You know, what did you think of his exegesis of the Hebrew? I wouldn't have gone that direction. I don't know, he's not dressed very nice, and I heard he's got a tattoo that says King of kings and Lord of lords down his thigh. I don't know what our position is on tattoos. Someone else said that he eats with sinners. I heard maybe that he slipped in a ham sandwich. He also drinks." Right? They're having the wrong conversation, all right, they're twittering it. You know, it's just everybody else is getting involved. The whole pajama hadin's on board. All the bloggers are giving their opinion, meanwhile this guy's like, "I'm healed! Anyone else want to come to my house for a party? My sins are forgiven."

And you know what? I'm glad he was healed. I praise God that he was healed. I rejoice that he was healed. But the big miracle, the exciting part, his sins were forgiven. That's the great part. Now healing, that's a bonus, we're all for it. Jesus can and does heal, but if you had to choose between healing and forgiveness, forgiveness is what you want, because if nothing else, at the resurrection of the dead, healing is a bonus that God throws in for all of his children, and the miracle here is that sinners can be forgiven.

JESUS CLEANSSES, FORGIVES, AND SAVES

So I got good news, Mars Hill. I'm actually really fired up today. I love this, 'cause it's the Bible going, "If you're filthy, Jesus cleanses. If you're guilty, Jesus forgives. And if you're religious, knock it off." I love that. All right, that's everybody. If you're breathing, you're on one of these teams. So we have to respond as he did and as they did, filled with awe, we're cleansed, we're forgiven, we don't want to get religious. So we repent of our filth, we repent of our sin, we repent of our religion, we're filled with awe. We rejoice and glorify God, really happy, because Jesus has touched us, Amen? I'm gonna pray. We gotta sing.

Father God, I thank you for the Bible. God, I love the Scriptures. I pray that we would love the Scriptures and that we would not encumber them with so much religion and God talk and rule making and do-ism, but instead, Lord God, we would see that the Bible's about Jesus. It's about what he does, not what we do. It's about the perfect life he lived, not the perfect life we should live. It's about the grace that he gives, it's not about the works that we do. I pray, Lord God, that like the leper, we would accept our identity as clean, go live a new, clean life that, because you've made us clean, may we come clean, may we live clean. God, like the paralytic, thank you that you forgive sin. May we take up our mat and walk. May we walk in newness of life with Jesus. And God, as frustrated as I and we get by religious people, we confess and I confess, we're religious people. We have a different list with different rules that aren't in the Bible. God, may we just accept what is in the Bible and not add to it, not become self-righteous, not become proud. God, we know that religion is the default mode of the human heart, but as we see from the story, it's religion that keeps hurting people from Jesus. So God, I pray for those who are hurting that they would throw themselves at Jesus' feet, that they would recognize him as Lord, that they would worship him and that they would beg for mercy and that, Lord Jesus, you would come and touch them. I pray for those who would hear this and they've been brought by friends, that, Lord God, you would forgive their sins and call them to sin no more and to walk home with joy. And God for those of us who are religious or have been religious or will be religious, thank you that you cleanse from filth, that you forgive sin and you save from religion. Amen.

[End of Audio]

Note: This sermon transcript has been edited for readability.