

Luke Chapter 5 – John Karmelich

1. As I read Chapter 5 a few times, I kept thinking, what do these all these stories about Jesus have in common and what does God want us to learn from them? Then it hit me: The text teaches us proof that Jesus is God. Let me ask the question that I suspect even the most devout Christians ponder: How do we know Jesus, and Jesus alone is God? After all, how can God be everywhere and be Jesus at the same time? Another question is what if Jesus is just a person or an angel with special powers to do miracles and not God Himself? If our faith in Jesus hangs on the concept of Jesus truly being God, how do we know? What I discovered is this chapter lays out proofs of that issue. That's why that question is my lesson title.
 - a) Before I start, let me bring up the issue of doubts. I've heard some of the most talented preachers and apologists for Jesus have their moments of doubts. Sometimes it is due to the vastness of the universe, sometimes it the study of other religions, and sometimes it is just plain doubts. Greg Koukl, a professional Christian apologist put it this way: If we're 80% sure that Jesus is God and we have say 20% doubts, should we trust our 80% or trust our 20%? My point is even if the strongest Christians have doubts at time. Even with that understood, this chapter lays out some incredible proofs that Jesus is God. If your doubts are more than 50%, hopefully I believe this lesson will help you increase that trust factor.
2. What I ponder sometimes is if the gospels are made up, why was the motivation for Luke and the other Gospel writers? What's in it for them? History records that most of them were tortured to death for their faith in Jesus including Luke. None of the apostles had money or power based on their trust in Jesus. To share a classic line: some would die for what they believe is the truth. No one is willing to die for what they know is a lie. Know that history records the death of the bible writers was under torture as they refused even until their death to deny Jesus as God.
3. With that said, let me summarize the stories as laid out in this chapter that are familiar to most of us: First is the story of Jesus preaching from Peter's boat. To prove Jesus is God, He asks Peter to lower his net for a catch. Peter effectively responds, "Jesus, you know the bible and you're a great teacher, but I know fishing. I've worked all night. Now it is daytime and the fish are down deep, so there are none to catch." After he "took his foot out of his mouth", he let out his net for a catch, and to make a long story short, caught so much fish it almost sank his boat. My point is only God can control the fish of the sea in that way to make this event occur.
 - a) The second story is Jesus curing a man of leprosy. In the bible, the only man ever cured of that disease was a foreign army general as instructed by the prophet Elisha (2nd Kings 5). His disease was only skin deep. The man who came to Jesus was near death. For the man who came to Jesus, he would have to have his limbs and nerves grow instantly back. I'll give more details later, but in summary, there is no human explanation for this event.
 - b) The third story was a paralyzed man brought to Jesus in a stretcher. He tells that man his sins are forgiven. The Jewish bible experts who witnessed this event, correctly stated only God can forgive sins. Jesus responded, to prove I'm God and I can forgive sins, I will now instantly heal this paralyzed man. Instead of needing crutches and having to learn how to walk again, this man instantly walks. My point is no miracle worker can do this. It shows God's power working through Jesus.
 - c) The next story is about how a crooked tax collector was willing to give up everything in order to follow Jesus. Ask yourself if you're willing to truly give up everything and drop your lifestyle in order to trust Jesus? This lifestyle change makes the argument that Jesus is God. The final story is in effect a similar point. Jesus tells about not putting old wine in new wine skins. That parable isn't about wine, but only about doing things a "new way". The new way involves living for God and fully trusting Him as if we have nothing to offer Him in return. For the details of all these stories, let me get started on those details:

4. Chapter 5, Verse 1: One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the people crowding around him and listening to the word of God,² he saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets.³ He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.
- a) To begin, let's quickly review where we left off. We last left Jesus traveling from place to place in the Lake Galilee region of Israel. The text says He was healing people. That is, He was performing miracles by healing whatever ailed people. He was getting popular. He was drawing large crowds wherever He went as I'm sure the crowds wanted to see for example a limb grow back where it wasn't there before or other physical ailments end. The last chapter ended with a comment how Jesus went by Himself to pray and making an announcement that He must preach elsewhere. Bottom line, now is the "elsewhere" as Jesus is standing at the edge of what we call the Sea of Galilee (a fresh water lake). If you read this story in Matthew's account Jesus was in Capernaum (Matthew 4:12). That town existed back then on the northern edge of that sea.
 - b) To describe these stories, I'd like to discuss of all things, the fishing boats that were used for Jesus to speak upon. It wasn't a little rowboat. The boat was big enough for a decent size crew to work. Most of you know the story of all the disciples going on this same boat when Peter walked on water. (Matthew 14:27-29). My point is the boat was big enough for Jesus and His disciples. A fishing boat back then had two levels. The lower level was for storing the fish that was caught (think of it as a big tank) and the upper level is where the fishermen worked.
 - c) To continue, understand that Simon (later called Peter) thought of Jesus at this moment in time as a great teacher, not God. Professional fishermen like Peter worked at night when it was the best time to catch fish. Fish would come near the surface to feed at night and in the early morning hours and then go down deep during the heat of the day. The way that fisherman worked is they would work all night with very large nets dragging them across the lake trying to draw fish in the nets. After working all night, these fishermen then had to clean their nets of whatever was caught in them that was not sellable fish in the market. Fishing boats would work in pairs to drag this large net across the sea. Again by studying all four accounts, one discovers there was a partnership in this fishing business: Peter and his brother Andrew, along with John and his brother James. All four of those fishermen became part of Jesus band of 12 disciples. Later in this story, I'll explain why all of that is relevant to these verses. In the meantime, to get back to these verses themselves.
 - d) Picture the four disciples along with other tired fishermen who worked all night at trying to catch fish and as Verse 5 tells us, they didn't catch anything. Before they could sleep, the final job was to clean their large nets (that in one account I read may be a quarter to a half mile in size all spread out). Anyway, while these men were cleaning their nets, here comes Jesus with a large crowd following Him wanting to see more miracles. The crowd had grown to the size where Jesus couldn't even talk to them, because they were pushing each other to get close and hopefully make a request of Jesus.
 - e) To give Jesus some breathing room, He asked Peter, who met Jesus in the last chapter, to row a little distance from the beach so Jesus could speak to this large crowd. In the last chapter, one of the miracles done was Jesus healing Peter's mother in law of a high fever. Peter probably thought, "Since my wife is happy as You cured my mother in law's fever, I (Peter) owe you one, let me row for You".
 - f) After stating all of those probable background facts, the point is Jesus now taught from the boat using the water as a natural amplifier of His voice. He could teach as the crowd was no longer trying to grab at Him and were able to listen to His words. Notice the text doesn't say here what Jesus actually said. The text simply focuses upon the fact that this is how Jesus taught. All of this background will lead to the first miracle of this chapter.

5. Verse 4: When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." ⁵ Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets." ⁶ When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. ⁷ So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.
- a) Let me paraphrase Simon (Peter) at this point: Jesus, I respect you as a great bible teacher and my wife is grateful however you cured her mother's fever. However, you may know your bible, but I know fishing. It's now the middle of the day and all the fish have gone down deep due to the heat. Besides, my partners and I worked all night trying to catch fish and we didn't get anyway. Still, I owe You one for healing "mom", so I'll spread my nets in the water just to make you happy!"
 - b) At that point of course, they caught so many fish, their nets were breaking. Peter signaled his buddies from work in the other boat to help him. As I said, typical fishing boats have two levels. The lower level is to hold the catch and the upper level is to work. The point is so many fish were caught, that two boats were beginning to sink because they were so over-loaded with fish.
 - c) Pause and consider what these verses mean: It means that since Jesus is God, He controls where fish can be at any time. I suspect God arranged those fish to be at surface level to demonstrate to Peter that Jesus is God and is in control of all things. This simple story of catching fish shows us Jesus' power over nature and how He can manipulate that power for His glory. As we'll read in the next set of verses, that catch of fish did change Peter's perspective on Jesus. In other words, "this" did the trick:
6. Verse 8: When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" ⁹ For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, ¹⁰ and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners.
- a) First, notice this is the first time that Simon is referred to as Simon Peter. In Matthew's Gospel (Chapter 16:18) we learn that Simon got the nickname Peter as the word Peter means "small rock". Jesus used Peter's name as a "pun". Jesus' point was that upon the statement made by Peter that Jesus is God is the foundation "rock" of the church and the fact that Peter made that confession is the "pun" of the little rock (Peter) confessing Jesus as God is the "big rock" that the church is based on.
 - b) I state that here as in effect Luke is telling the same story from a different perspective. We don't read Luke focusing on the fact that Jesus is God, we read Luke focusing on the fact that Peter realized that He was in the presence of God Himself and that's why Peter says in Verse 8 that he is a "sinful man". In other words, the size of the catch of fish that they caught made Peter realize, nobody but God can do this. Peter then thought about His own sinfulness in God's presence.
 - c) Stop and think what Peter didn't say: Hey Jesus, we can go into business together. You can tell me where the fish are, and we can rich quickly doing this. Give Peter credit for realizing that having God there did not mean Peter had the right to tell Jesus what it is He can and cannot do with His knowledge as God.
 - d) Grant it Peter and his fellow fishermen still didn't get the idea that Jesus had to suffer and die for the sins of the world. They just got the idea that whoever Jesus was, He truly had God's power working within Him. There is no other explanation for the fish catch. These verses also introduce us in Luke's gospel for the first time to James and John. If you know the Gospel stories, you know that even among the 12 apostles, the "inner circle" was often these three men. We learn here they were all fishing partners together at one time.
 - e) Stop and consider who Jesus picked to be His top disciples. He didn't pick bible scholars or people with great preaching abilities. He picked ordinary men to go make a difference for Jesus in this world. That's a great lesson right there for what God can do through us.

7. Verse 10 continued: Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men." ¹¹ So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.
- a) Remember that at this point, Peter is still standing there with his mouth wide open at all the fish that he and his partners caught. Peter realized He was in the presence of God or at the least someone who truly had God's power working through Jesus. With everyone standing there wondering what Jesus would say at this point, including the large crowds who are still standing at the shoreline, Jesus says, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men".
 - i) To state the obvious, Peter and the disciples didn't start making true converts until after Jesus death and resurrection. My point is Jesus was predicting their future to these fishermen. Yes the number of Jesus followers did grow during the time that He ministered before His death, but that large number of people came down to a small group once Jesus was sentenced to death.
 - b) Let me talk for a moment about "fear" and being a witness to people. I'm convinced that most Christians are more than happy to talk to others about Jesus but don't know how to make the jump from normal conversation to Him without offending people. A common fear is people won't like us if every conversation we have turns to a discussion on religion. The way I view it is much simpler. All we have to do is be willing to live life differently enough to where people in need bring up the topic to us. Think about how Paul brought up the topic of Jesus. First Paul spoke in synagogues where it is acceptable to talk about how one should worship God. Then Paul would say talk about Jesus while in jail as there is where people are thinking about eternal freedom and what that really means. To me, being a witness for Jesus is simply about how we live out our lives. I promise that if we are willing to be a witness God gives us those opportunities.
 - i) In summary, the simple idea is just to have normal conversations and be willing to ask people about their lives. One doesn't have to force Christianity upon people. We just have to willing to engage in conversation and if that conversation leads to a point where we can discuss our faith without forcing the issue, it does happen.
 - ii) Grant it, one has to do what is appropriate. If one is at work, one cannot be using time we're supposed to be using for work to stop and preach. If one is living in a place where Christianity is illegal one has to be careful how one brings that up.
 - iii) In summary, just as Jesus was giving Peter and the other disciples the power to be a witness for Jesus, so He gives us that power to be a witness and overcome our fears of what we are supposed to say as a witness to Him.
 - c) In the meantime, it's time to move on to the next story in this chapter. Let's read on and see the next bit of evidence that points to the case that Jesus not only had the power to do miracles, but He is God Himself. With that said, time for "story #2" in this chapter.
8. Verse 12: While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the ground and begged him, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." ¹³ Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" And immediately the leprosy left him.
- a) I was thinking about how we can relate to this story unless we had first hand experience in dealing with leprosy. The closest thing I could think of is "AIDS" today. If you could pick the worst thing to happen to yourself other than maybe go through severe cancer, AIDS is it. That four-letter acronym refers to a disease that is so horrible, its not usually brought up in conversation unless we know someone who has it.
 - b) I state all that here, as I want us to think about "AIDS" as I describe what is leprosy. The short version of leprosy is it causes one's nerves to stop working. You can lose limbs and body parts as one stops feeling body parts due to a loss of senses. Eventually one's body stops working as the nervous system dies. At the least, this story does show that no one is beyond God's help no matter what is their condition or whatever "mess" we are in.

- c) In ancient Israel, those who had leprosy were considered so untouchable by those living in that society that those who had this disease were not allowed to get near to anyone in public. Ancient Jewish traditions required those who had it, not to be near anyone else so the disease would not spread. If it wasn't bad enough to have leprosy in the first place, if one had it, they had to be separated from society. Survival was close to impossible.
- d) This disease was so fatal, the book of Leviticus spends two chapters focusing on how we are to spot it and isolate it. Those chapters never discuss how to cure it, but only how to recognize it and what is a false alarm versus the real thing. If by some miracle someone who has leprosy recovers, Leviticus Chapter 14 discusses how that person is to be checked and then accepted back into society.
- e) I give that brief background on leprosy as it ties well to the text here. Consider that those who had leprosy were not allowed to be amongst people. Here was a man covered with leprosy. That man probably figured, "I'm going to die anyway. If I'm going to get killed for being amongst other people, it's a better death than to die slowly and painfully from leprosy. Therefore, let me plea with Jesus for help as I truly have nothing to lose.
- f) Now stop and consider how God wants us to come to Him: Not by offering anything, but to realize our own desperation for His help for our own lives. We discover that God does His best work, when we like that man with leprosy truly have nothing to lose. It's like the realization we're going to die anyway, we might as well appeal to Jesus for our lives as we have nothing to lose by trying.
- g) With that said, notice Jesus actually touched the man. To state the obvious, that act was forbidden out of fear of catching the disease oneself. By the way, if you think leprosy is a long-dead disease, it still exists today in the Middle East and third world countries.
 - i) With that in mind, here is this man full of leprosy approaching Jesus. I picture the crowd surrounding Jesus walking away as no one wants to get this disease. Yet here is Jesus willing to help when no one else is willing to touch Him. It's sort of amazing to consider that one of the first miracles performed in this gospel is one that is not discussed in the Old Testament's discussion of it: How it is brought to an end. The Old Testament teaches us how to recognize it, but never how to cure it. Here comes Jesus as God and one of the first miracles performed in the bible is to cure what was considered incurable in the Old Testament.
 - ii) OK then, if Jesus could do that, why are there so many people today painfully and slowly dying from AIDS and other horrible diseases? Why can't any or all of them just pray to Jesus and their pain come to an end? I suspect the reason is that Jesus didn't come here to cure every disease today, but to show people how we can have eternal life and joy despite whatever pain we are dealing with at the moment.
 - iii) Jesus healed this man to show us His power over disease. Jesus doesn't cure every disease today as the goal is not to live on earth forever. The goal is to get people to trust in Jesus complete payment for sin so we can live pain free in heaven forever.
- h) Before we read on, let's look at the big picture of what is happening so far in this chapter:
 - i) First we have Jesus proving to Peter, John and others that Jesus has the power of God over nature by the big fish catch.
 - ii) Now we see Jesus power over nature by ending an incurable disease. Did the man who had leprosy still die later? Of course. That's why the miracle's purpose is not for the man to live pain free forever. This miracle was done to show us that Jesus has power not only over nature but also over what's affecting us at any moment.
 - iii) So if the purpose of being a Christian is not to live "pain free" what is it? It's to use the time God has given us to make a difference for Him despite whatever it is that we have to deal with at any given time. As I stated in the last lesson, there was a pastor who died from cancer who made the statement, "The God who can rescue me from cancer is the one who allowed me to get cancer to begin with."

9. Verse 14: Then Jesus ordered him, "Don't tell anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them."
 - a) Meanwhile, it's time for us to get back to the story itself. One of the problems that Jesus had at this point is not being "thronged" to death by everyone wanting to touch Him in order to be cured by whatever they were dealing with. Here was a man who had leprosy and now looked normal probably for the first time in years. I don't know if new limbs grew or parts of his body that were missing were now there, but I suspect that whoever saw this miracle live stopped to pause for a moment. Jesus used that pause to tell the man cured of leprosy to go show himself to the priests. Let me explain that:
 - i) I mentioned earlier that Leviticus Chapter 14 has a whole set of rituals that one is required to go through in order to prove that one no longer has this disease. That means Jesus did not want this Jewish person to violate any Old Testament law as he was now cured of this disease.
 - ii) I suspect that Jesus was also trying to buy some time here. Jesus gave the order for this man to keep quiet. Imagine how hard it would be to tell a person to be quiet after something like this happened. Ordering the cured man to travel all the way to Jerusalem to offer the required sacrifice for this cure would buy Jesus some time before the crowds got any bigger from doing this miracle.
 - iii) The second benefit of this order was that it would show the priests working at the temple that Jesus had this power to cure someone of leprosy. As important and as central as that temple was, it showed the power of Jesus in comparison to the duty and the power the priests had who worked at that temple.
 - b) With that said, I picture this man who was cured being so grateful for the cure, that he ran from the scene as fast as possible. I'm also sure he violated Jesus order to keep quiet as it'd be too much for anyone to keep quiet about what happened. The next verse is my proof that he didn't keep quiet and the event did not go unnoticed.
10. Verse 15: Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. ¹⁶ But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.
 - a) To tell my running joke of this series, anyone with a hangnail to a bad back was now just trying to touch Jesus. I suspect a big part of being Jesus disciple was to order the crowds to go away and announce things like, "There will be no more miracles today, please leave Jesus alone and come back tomorrow." That is how I picture Jesus even having the ability to be alone and pray. However it happened, Jesus did have moments where he got away from the crowd and spent those alone times refreshing Himself in prayer.
 - i) Let me add a point that I've learned over and over again. There are times when I have worked so hard, all I want to do was be alone and relax for an hour or two. I sometimes need to remind myself that God wants to refresh me during such times and simply talking to Him about what I am going through at the moment is just as refreshing if not more so then being a "vegetable" in front of the television. All I am saying is that God knows we get tired and He wants to be there for us during such times and give us the strength to go forward.
 - b) Let me touch on something else here. If Jesus was God, why did He have the need to go pray in the first place? In other words if Jesus is God, did He get tired? Did He require a good night sleep like the rest of us? The way I view this is that Jesus became fully human as well as retained being fully God. Humans are designed to need sleep. Ever notice how much better one feels when one is sleeping well? I'm convinced that God made us with a need for sleep for one reason to show us that the world will survive without us if we stop and sleep for a third of the day.
 - i) Coming back to Jesus, think of it as Him as taking on the role of being fully human did require Him to refresh Him in prayer and did require Him to sleep at night. I believe it is as simple as that to consider. OK, time for the next story:

11. Verse 17: One day as he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law, who had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem, were sitting there. And the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick.¹⁸ Some men came carrying a paralytic on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus.¹⁹ When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus.
- a) Now we come to another famous bible story about a man who was fully paralyzed so that he couldn't move. If one has ever met a paraplegic they often have no use of their lower half of the body or a full paraplegic has no feeling from the neck down. They cannot live without the help of others. Apparently this one had enough friends who cared about him that they were willing to carry him to Jesus. In ancient times, this man probably lived by begging. I suspect his friends or family members helped with the collection and used that money to help this man survive. With all of that said, here was Jesus coming to wherever these men were and since Jesus had the reputation for healing people, the four buddies of that man carried him to Jesus on a stretcher.
 - b) A little more background will be helpful here. Israelite houses were typically one story in height with a stairwell leading to a flat roof. Because of the heat, they often had rooftop patios. This one house where Jesus was currently teaching in was crowded. In fact at this time, there were people who came from all parts of Israel to here him speak including the religious leaders of Israel (Verse 17). I suspect this house was larger than most as a large crowd was there. There was probably a large living room where Jesus spoke in. Anyway, it was so full of people that the men carrying the paraplegic could not get in the house.
 - c) One has to remember that there was no handicap access in those days. It's hard for me to imagine people being so self-centered that they would not help a paraplegic get close to Jesus in the first place. My guess is that everyone there so desperately wanted healing of their own illnesses that they were not willing to give up their "standing room only" seats for even someone who definitely need healing.
 - d) I should also explain who are the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. These groups are both major characters so let me describe them here. In Israel at that time, there were four major political factions recorded in history. There were the Sadducee's who didn't believe in the supernatural. The classic joke is they didn't believe in angels or miracles and that is why they were "Sad you see". It's a bad joke, but it helps to remember who they were. It is best to think of them as the liberals of that day. Then there were the Zealot's who were willing to kill Romans to end their occupation. Then there were the Essenes who were the monks of that day. They wanted to separate themselves from society for God. The Dead Sea Scrolls that were found less than a hundred years ago were Old Testament scrolls that were preserved by the Essenes.
 - i) All of that background is necessary to explain who were the Pharisee's. My main point is that they were not the only religious Jews of that day. According to one account, there were only about 6,000 Pharisee's that existed at that time. Think of them as the most devout Orthodox Jews that lived at that time. Paul himself was raised and trained as a Pharisee before becoming a Christian. As opposed to the Saducee's they believed in the literal coming of the Messiah, angels, and miracles. I suspect that the Pharisee's came to check out Jesus to see if He was the Messiah and what they should do with Him.
 - ii) Finally, let me talk about the "teachers of the law". Think of this group as the elite among the elite. They were the highly trained scholars of that day. When people had a question about how God's law should properly be interpreted, the Israelites turned to this group for interpretation.
 - e) In summary, this house was crowded and included visitors from other parts of Israel who all wanted to see Jesus do something or else accuse Him of being a false teacher.

- f) All of that background leads me back to the story itself. The four men who brought the paraplegic man to Jesus were not going to give up that easily. These four men also had some rope with them as I suspect they needed it to regularly transport the paraplegic.
 - i) One has to give them credit for some good engineering work here. As I stated, most roofs there at that time had a stairwell or ladder access. They figured out roughly where Jesus was standing based on sound waves or the way the house was laid out. They then cut a hole in the roof that was probably made of dirt with tiles on top, so one could do it with one's hands. Then the four men used the ropes to lower Jesus down into the house.
 - ii) I was trying to picture this scene from inside the house. Ceiling pieces were falling around the visitors. Then this paralyzed man comes down on a stretcher roughly at the spot where Jesus was speaking. I'm sure some people had to get out of the way to make a spot for the stretcher to land. For what it is worth I also heard that the historian Josephus said that often occupied caskets were lowered through the roof in a similar manner, with the point being that site was not as unusual as one might think it might be.
 - iii) With all that background and commentary stated, let me read on.
- 12. Verse 20: When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."
 - a) Back in Verse 17, Luke made the comment that Jesus had the power to heal the sick that day. Recall that Luke only heard this story many years later. How did Luke know this? I believe that if Jesus is God, then He always has the power to heal. Luke's point is simply that Jesus was planning on performing a healing miracle at this event. With that in mind, the first thing Jesus says to the paraplegic man is "your sins are forgiven". I'm guessing it was not what this man wanted to hear. He wanted to hear about the end of his leprosy. This is the first time in Luke's Gospel where it even mentions the forgiveness of sin. We don't know how this man took those words, but my guess is that if the paraplegic man believed that Jesus had great powers, then this man took those words as comfort.
 - b) One has to remember that in that society to be a paraplegic was a sign that one is cursed by God for being in that condition in the first place. Grant it, the man was probably more interested in walking again, but I suspect he was happy with those words.
 - c) Also notice that Jesus was commenting on the faith of the four men who lowered the man into the room. Jesus said "their faith". In other words they trusted that Jesus can and will do something about the man's condition and he commented on their faith, not "his".
 - d) Now comes the dramatic confrontation:
- 13. Verse 21: The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, "Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"
 - a) The reason I spent a page explaining who the Pharisees were and other prominent groups back then was for this verse here: In this crowded room were some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law, who were both devoutly religious Jews. My point being that if they said, "No one but God can forgive sins", their opinion was taken seriously by those who don't know their bible that well. These bible experts were correct in their theology, only God can forgive our sins.
 - i) It's important to use a simple parable here to make my point: If I stole something from you and then I begged you for forgiveness, only you can forgive me, because you are the one I stole from. At the same time, to sin is to violate God's laws for the lives of those who trust in Him. Therefore, only God can forgive us of our sins.
 - b) One also wonders at this point if these bible experts were already looking for some excuse to arrest Jesus and making that accusation to help their argument. The point is Jesus was now put on the spot as He's claiming to be God, by offering complete forgiveness of this paraplegic's sins. For what it's worth some ancient bible scholars argue that the man had the venereal disease syphilis, which can cause one to be a paraplegic if not treated.

14. Verse 22: Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, "Why are you thinking these things in your hearts?" ²³ Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? ²⁴ But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...." He said to the paralyzed man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." ²⁵ Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. ²⁶ Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, "We have seen remarkable things today."
- a) At this point it's as if Jesus is thinking, "I know what everyone in this room is thinking, do I have the power of God to forgive sins or not"? In effect Jesus is on the spot that if He did not cure this man of this disease, they would doubt His claim that He could forgive sins.
 - b) This leads to the question of these verses, "What is easier to say, your sins are forgiven or get up and walk?" Jesus point is anyone can say "One's sins are forgiven, but it'd require the power of God in order to validate that claim. In effect, Jesus had no choice but to cure this man of the disease not so that he could live a better life, but to validate the real point that Jesus is who He claims to be.
 - c) This point leads to the miracle of this story. I don't see Jesus making a big deal or putting on a big show about what He's about to say. He just tells the man, get up, take your bed with you and go home. Stop and think about a man who has been a paraplegic for a long time. Such a person would have to learn how to walk like a young child has to learn how to walk. Jesus didn't offer the man crutches to help him or guide him. The man just did as Jesus told him to do and that was that.
 - d) This leads me back to the issue of how do I know Jesus is God? Let's all assume for the moment that the story is true. Again, ask yourself why would the author tell this story if it didn't bring the author any fame or fortune and Luke was tortured and killed for being a witness for Jesus. Since Luke wrote his gospel about 20 years after this event, I suspect he interviewed one or more people who were there to get his information.
 - i) All of that leads me back to the question of how do I know Jesus is God? It's one thing to have God's power to do this type of miracle. It's another to say that I can forgive sins and that's the point. The Pharisee's were correct that only God can forgive sins and Jesus proved He was God by making that statement and doing this miracle at the same time. Remember that Jesus did not say that God forgives you of your sins but that I (Jesus) forgive you of your sins.
 - ii) The point being is that either Jesus is a blasphemer of God or God Himself. There is no other option here. The fact that He did the miracle lays proof to Jesus own claim that He is God come in human flesh.
 - e) As to the crowd in that room, I don't think it all sunk in yet. They were all in amazement about the miracle of the man walking. I suspect some of the locals in that room knew the man as to verify that he's been a paraplegic for a long time. Anyway, people walked out of that room praising God for that miracle including the former paraplegic himself. Even though no one was willing to debate Jesus on the is He God or not point, they were all in such shock over the miracle, everyone just left probably to go tell others about what they saw there in the room.
 - f) Before I move on, I've actually heard people say, "What about the hole in the roof? Who fixed that?" Whenever there's any sort of large event, there are always unsung hero's who have to clean up afterwards. I'm guessing there were such hero's here as well.
 - g) With that said, we're ready to move on to our next story, which is about a man named Levi, who we also know as Matthew, the writer of the Gospel of Matthew.
 - i) Before I begin, I need to talk a little about tax collectors in Israel. This group was among the most hated in Israel as they supported the Roman Government. As a group they were considered thieves and undesirable. The Romans would require a specific amount of tax per area. Whatever they collected above that, they kept.

- ii) My point is when one thinks of "the criminal class" in those days, the tax collectors were among that group. They hung out with each other as no one else wanted to be associated with them. They were outcasts in Jewish society. Even among that group, there were different levels. Think of some tax collectors as going from door to door demanding taxes with the power of Roman soldiers with them. Then they had the higher level tax collectors who sat in booths and waited for the people to come to them. Matthew was one of those higher-up's as the next verse coming up mentions that Jesus spotted him in his booth.
 - h) Let me also talk about the names "Matthew and Levi". It is common then and now for people to have more than one name. One could have born with one name and the other being a name people gave to him. Matthew means "The Lord's gift". The name "Levi" literally means, "attached". My personal suspicion is that Matthew was the name he was born with but because that name is associated with God, he changed it to Levi when he got in the Roman tax "racket". I'll have to ask him one day in heaven.
 - i) With that said, let's look at the next two verses:
- 15. Verse 27: After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. "Follow me," Jesus said to him,²⁸ and Levi got up, left everything and followed him.
 - a) My first thought is why would Levi give up this well paying job? I suspect he has already seen Jesus do some sort of miracle. Maybe he was already convinced that Jesus was God and the guilt of his lifestyle caught up with him. It makes one wonder, what would make anyone quit their lives as they know it to follow Jesus? Think of the millions (billions) of people through the centuries who in effect quit their lives because they were convinced of the fact that Jesus was God. That's what motivates me to do this ministry to give a simple example of such.
 - b) My point is I don't think it was the way Jesus ask Levi to join him. I'm just convinced that Levi (Matthew) saw the emptiness of a lifestyle to only live to make money and figured it is time for him to change.
 - c) There is an old expression among bible preachers that there are some people who strongly support Jesus, others who strongly oppose Jesus and the "masses" in the middle. In effect the easiest one's to reach are those who realize how desperate they are for God's help as opposed to those who think they are a pretty good person based on their lifestyle. I state all of that as I suspect Levi was at that point where he realized how despicable he was and his only hope was for God Himself to forgive him. That realization of our desperation is what drove Levi to follow Jesus and hopefully our own desperation works for us as well.
 - d) My point is Levi's willingness to leave that lifestyle is also what should drive you and me to trust in Jesus as God as we too realize how worthless our eternal lives are without Him.
- 16. Verse 29: Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them.³⁰ But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and `sinners'?"
 - a) What's the first thing most people do when they accept Jesus as God? They are so excited they go tell others about what happened. Since a tax collector is the dread of society he had no one else to tell but his fellow tax collectors. Bottom line here is that Levi invited Jesus to his house to meet other tax collectors to show them how this religious man was willing to take him on, despite his background.
 - b) I'm pretty positive this event occurred right after the miracle of the paralyzed man being cured. That's because a bunch of Pharisee's and "teachers of the law" (legal experts) were there to question why Jesus would eat with them. The question is in effect, if you are who you claim to be, why would you ever even want to associate with people like this in the first place? After, all we (Pharisee's, teachers) are the ones you need to convince that you are who you claim to be as we are the bible experts. Jesus' response is the next verse.

17. Verse 31: Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick." ³² I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."
- a) As I read this, what popped in my head was something that happened about 10-20 years ago. The popular radio personality Rush Limbaugh agreed to be interviewed for Playboy Magazine. Rush who claims to be a devout Christian asked why he would do this, and he quoted these two verses from the bible. In other words, he was interested in reaching out to those who don't share his views on life to "make them healthy". My point has nothing to do with Rush's politics. My point is we have to be willing to reach out to those who are not willing to listen to the gospel message. The problem with Christians is we may get to a point in life where we consider nonbelievers "riff-raff" and refuse to hang out with them.
 - b) To put it another way, it's one thing to go to a bar just to get drunk. It's another thing to go there to talk to someone about Jesus. Many years ago when I was a young believer I remember being in New Orleans to go to a famous concert there. I remember meeting a girl (before I was married) who asked me questions about Jesus. The strangest thing is I remember talking to her in some nearby bar for about 15 minutes. After that encounter we both went our separate ways and I never saw her again. I got the impression that she didn't know much about Christianity and she just wanted to pick my brain. My point is that we should never be so "high-brow" in our attitude that we aren't willing to reach out to those who don't know much about Jesus that we be willing to talk to others and share our faith if the questions are brought up.
 - c) Since I've beaten that point to death, it's time to move on to the next story:
18. Verse 33: They said to him, "John's disciples often fast and pray, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours go on eating and drinking."
- a) First question, who are the they? The "they" would be the people from the previous set of verses who questioned Jesus about eating with tax collectors and the "riff-raff". With that said, I need to give a quick word about Pharisee's and fasting. They did it in a very public way, every Monday and Thursday in order to show people around them how pious they were. Yes they would disfigure themselves and look remorseful. That is why Jesus did preach on the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:16-18) that when one fasts one should do it in secret and not make a big show of it. It was a shot at these Pharisee's.
 - b) So why did John's disciples fast? First know at this time, that John was probably in jail. What I suspect is that many people went to the Jordan to confess their sins and then they didn't know what to do next. Therefore they became like the Pharisee's thinking that this is the way God wants them to live in preparation for the Messiah.
 - c) With all that background, it's time to get Jesus response to this question:
19. Verse 34: Jesus answered, "Can you make the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them?" ³⁵ But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; in those days they will fast."
- a) Jesus uses an illustration that most of us can relate to: Is it ever appropriate for someone to fast at a wedding feast? Of course not, and that's the point. That leads to Verse 35 as Jesus makes the statement that "the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them". I'm pretty positive this is Jesus' first direct reference to His own crucifixion. My point is this is another proof that Jesus is God as He was aware of His own destiny a long time prior to that event occurring.
 - b) That leads me back to the purpose of fasting, which I discussed in the last lesson. It is a way of showing God our commitment to Him by our willingness to not eat for a while. I don't see it as a requirement to be a Christian, but just as a practice to show our dedication to Him. Even when we do fast, we need to use Jesus' model in Matthew 6 and not do it in public in any way. As the late pastor Chuck Smith once put it, "If I'm fasting and then I'm offered food by someone, I eat the food as I don't share that fasting publicly". Jesus point and my point is one fasts at appropriate times, and this was not one of those times.

20. Verse 36: He told them this parable: "No one tears a patch from a new garment and sews it on an old one. If he does, he will have torn the new garment, and the patch from the new will not match the old.³⁷ And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined.³⁸ No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins.³⁹ And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for he says, 'The old is better.' "
- a) Jesus gives two illustrations here. Both make the same point. Let me describe both of them and then I'll explain how it ties to this lesson.
 - i) Imagine wearing some brand new clothing. Let's assume it's never been washed before. If you tear part of it off to fix an old piece of clothing, when it is washed the piece from the new garment will stretch and then neither piece of clothing will be any good. The simple point here is combining the new with the old won't work with clothing. With that said, let me know explain the second one:
 - ii) In the Middle East they would make a sack to hold liquid out of the skin of a dead animal back then. New wine (think fresh grapes) when it gets old, develops gas and to put it simply, the liquid expands. Therefore, one needs those wineskins to be able to expand to allow for that wine to expand. When wineskins get old, they no longer stretch. Jesus point has nothing to do with drinking. It's just another illustration to make the point that "one cannot mix the old with the new".
 - b) OK then, why is this parable here and what does Jesus want us to learn here? To answer, remember whom Jesus is speaking to: Some devoutly religious Pharisee's and others who were baptized by John. Jesus point is that one can't worship God using the complex set of rituals devised by religious Jews as interpretation of the law. I'll explain this more in the next lesson, but just understand that religious Jews had a very detailed set of laws based on their own interpretation of God's laws. To put it simply, they thought that in order to be pleasing to God, one has to follow a very strict set of rules and guidelines and then He will be pleased with us. Jesus is teaching the opposite. Coming to God's all about coming to Him totally broken and trusting Jesus to guide our lives. In other words, to be pleasing to God is not about following a complicated set of man-made rules and regulations. It's about our trust in Him to guide our lives based on what His word teaches us.
 - i) All of that leads me back to these two illustrations. Jesus point is one can't mix the "old way" with the "new way". That's why Jesus said one can't mix part of a brand new garment with an old one and one can't use old wineskins for new wine. His point is the way we follow God is not by "trying harder" with all of those rules, but by in effect, "giving up" and letting God be in charge of our lives".
 - ii) So are you saying God's laws are a bad thing? Never. They teach us the best way to live out our lives. However, we can't be pleasing to God by keeping them. We can only be pleasing to Him by accepting Jesus payment for our sins and trusting in Him as one who rules over our lives. Jesus wasn't condemning the law with the statements in these verses. He was condemning the very complex set of rules that were made back then that they believe were the correct way to interpret the Law. For example, the fact they fasted twice a week is not in the bible, it is just a small part of their complicated set of interpretations on how to follow God's laws.
 - c) Finally let me talk about these verses in my argument that Jesus is God. Think about who is giving the command to do things a "new way". It is another proof that Jesus is God as He's the one telling us to not be dependant upon a complicated set of regulations that are not written in the bible, but just man's interpretation of it. In summary, I study the Old Testament, and I let God guide me as how to interpret it and not try to please God based on any set of rituals or my obedience to regulations. Does the bible convict me of things I'm doing wrong? All the time. That's why I'm sure it is the word of God and it keeps my 80% probability that Jesus is God at least that high if not higher all the time.

21. Let's pray: Father, help us to remember that not only You are God, but You desire to guide our lives for Your glory. Help us not to trust in any set of rituals in order to be pleasing to You, but just to trust in Your word and Your guidance so that we can make a difference for You in a world that is dying around us. Help us to use the most valuable thing we own, our time, through the power of Your Spirit in order to make that difference. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen