

On Sundays we're working our way through Luke's Gospel, and we find ourselves at chapter 5, verse 20. The title of this morning's message is "*What We Really Need.*"

Last week we looked at verse 20, and believe it or not, this morning we're looking at verse 20 again, and here's why...

- Last week had a real focus on what it meant when Jesus told this man his sins were forgiven.
- And this morning we're going to be talking about WHY Jesus told this man his sins were forgiven and what exactly that means for us.

²⁰ When He saw their faith, He said to him, "Man, your sins are forgiven you."

I hope we were able to develop an appreciation last week for how truly wonderful Jesus' words were: He told this man that what no OT sacrifice had ever done in taking away, and what had never been done even on the Day of Atonement, was done for him.

BUUUUT...and let's be honest: do you really think this is what they expected to hear? Do you really think these men did all this to get their paralyzed friend before Jesus so He could say, "**Your sins are forgiven**"? I'm guessing when Jesus said this, they thought, "*You have GOT to be kidding me! We went to all this trouble, and this is what we get?*" There's only one thing they wanted to hear, and it was the words, "*Rise up and walk!*"

And just think for a minute about the poor paralyzed man: imagine all the excitement he was feeling. He's finally in front of Jesus. He knows he's going to be walking soon. Then imagine the tremendous letdown when he hears these words instead. He had been dealing w/ something terrible and he expected it be over, but Jesus didn't say anything about it.

We can learn a very, very important lesson though about the Lord's work in our lives from what we're seeing here, and it's this...

(PART I) GOD FOCUSES ON OUR SPIRITUAL NEEDS (this is actually going to be like one long lesson that threads through the whole sermon with four parts).

If you looked at this man physically, beyond the shadow of a doubt his greatest problem was PARALYSIS. Usually people had parts of their bodies that were paralyzed - maybe a hand or an arm or a leg - but this man had to be carried by people, which is to say his paralysis was severe. He was probably what we know as a quadriplegic, w/ no control of any of his limbs. Basically, you couldn't BE physically needier than this man.

But when Jesus looked at him - I don't want to say Jesus wasn't concerned at all w/ his physical needs - but He was WAY more concerned w/ the man's spiritual needs.

If we can understand this about our relationships w/ God - that He is more focused on our spiritual needs than our physical needs - I think it can really help us in two ways:

1. First, it can help us understand - and even appreciate - the trials and difficulties we experience.

2. Second, it can help us understand and appreciate our relationships w/ God, and in particular why He doesn't remove some of those trials and difficulties.

First, let's just establish that whether we like it or not, the Bible clearly says trials serve great purposes in our lives:

- **Rom 5:3-4 we...glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; ⁴and perseverance, character; and character, hope.**
- **2 Cor 4:17 Our light affliction...is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.**
- **Jam 1:2-4 count it all joy when you fall into various trials, ³ knowing the testing of your faith produces patience. ⁴ But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.**
- **1 Pet 1:6-7 Greatly rejoice [that] you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷ that the genuineness of your faith...though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.**

So we have these verses about the way God uses trials in our lives for our benefit and growth.

Jerry Bridges said, *“Paul and James both say we should rejoice in our trials because of their beneficial results. It is not the adversity considered in itself that is to be the source of our joy. Rather, it is the expectation of the results, the development of our character that should cause us to rejoice in adversity. God does not ask us to rejoice because we have lost a job, or a loved one has been stricken with cancer, or a child has been born with an incurable birth defect. But He does tell us to rejoice because we believe He is in control of those circumstances and is at work through them for our ultimate good.”*

Now logically, if the trials are removed, so too is the perfecting – or sanctifying work – they accomplish. And if God is more concerned w/ us spiritually than physically, we should expect plenty of trials and tribulations NOT to be removed. It's completely natural to want to get out of trials, but that's what God wants to use in our lives. What we really need are trials that help us grow.

I also said this can help us in our relationships w/ God b/c there can be a real tension at times. We've all experienced an amount of frustration when we've wondered:

- Why have you allowed this Lord?
- Why did you let this happen to me?
- Why haven't you removed this from my life?
- I have prayed about this situation more times than I can count, why haven't you made it better?

There can be a real struggle when God isn't:

- Doing what we want Him to do
- Or providing the help we expect Him to provide
- Or acting the way we think He should act
- Or He isn't doing what we consider loving.

And I'm telling you, right at this moment:

- This isn't what they wanted Jesus to do

- It isn't how they expected Jesus to help
- And it isn't what they thought was loving.

And when we experience situations like this in our lives, it can create real tension in our relationships w/ God. It can make us think:

- God doesn't care about me.
- God doesn't love me.
- Maybe I'm not really saved...maybe that's why He doesn't listen to me.
- Maybe God isn't real...maybe that's why He doesn't answer me, b/c He's not really there.

But the tension arises for one very simple reason: we're usually focused on our physical needs, but God is focused on our spiritual needs...like we see w/ this paralytic.

And it's not that God isn't concerned about the physical, emotional, social, mental, relational, or financial struggles we go through, it's just that He's leaving them in our lives to focus on our spiritual needs. He's allowing these trials to produce the spiritual work He knows is best for us.

Now there's one reason we can BE SURE God knows what's best for us, and it's this: He knows us. He can see our hearts. This is really one of the themes in Scripture:

- **Psa 44:21 God knows the secrets of the heart.**
- **1 Kin 8:39 You alone know the hearts of all men.**
- **Jer 20:12 O LORD of hosts, You who...see the mind and heart.**
- **Luke 16:15 God knows your hearts.**
- **Acts 1:24 You, O Lord...know the hearts of all.**
- **Rev 2:23 All the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts.**

God knows our hearts, and therefore He knows what's best for us.

Now guess who doesn't know our hearts? We don't: **Jer 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?** It's not talking about God not knowing the heart; we just heard all the verses about God knowing our hearts. It's about US not knowing our hearts. As a result:

- We don't know what's best for us:
- We don't know what we should have
- We don't know what we shouldn't have

But God does. Let me throw out a few situations:

- Maybe you want to make more money so you can get out of some financial difficulty, but...
 - Maybe God wants to use this situation to teach you to trust Him
 - Or maybe He's trying to teach you to be a better steward of your finances so you don't get yourself in this situation again.
- Maybe you want some illness out of your life, but...
 - Maybe God wants to use it to make you more prayerful
 - Or maybe He wants to use it to really make you turn to Him.

- Maybe there's something you really, really want and you pray for it, and pray for it, and it isn't something bad or compromising, but you never get it, b/c maybe God is trying to teach you contentment.
- Maybe you're forced to do something you really don't like – maybe it's something you think is below you, maybe you think it would be way better suited for someone else to do - but God hasn't removed you from doing it b/c maybe He wants to teach you some humility.

Rhea can get SUPER frustrated w/ Ricky, and Ricky can get super frustrated w/ Johnny. I encourage Rhea and Ricky by telling them that someday Johnny will be super frustrated with Charis, and hopefully we'll have more children so there will be a child that frustrates Charis. When God doesn't allow us to have any more children, we're going to see if someone will let us borrow their baby to bother our youngest child.

I'm joking, but the truth is I think it's really good for our kids to have younger kids around that are difficult. It teaches them patience, love, forgiveness, gentleness. Trials are like the younger sibling that God uses for our growth.

I also think it's great when our kids don't get certain things. It's great for kids to be told "No," b/c it allows them opportunities to be content and patient. The best way to make terrible kids is to give them what they want when they want it.

AND another way to make terrible kids is to remove any difficult situations from their lives. If we can all see this w/ our kids, we can be sure God sees it w/ us.

Now, I just threw out those four situations, and some of you might not relate to any of them, but let me throw out one situation almost all of you can relate to, and if you can't relate to it yet, more than likely you will, and that's marriage.

It isn't exactly like this, but for simplicity's sake I'm going to say there are two ways people view marriage:

1. One group says, *"Marriage is about my happiness. Marriage is about what I want and what I want to get out of it. How is this going to benefit me?"*
2. Another group of people says, *"Marriage is about my sanctification...marriage is about my holiness."*

Which group do you think finds marriage more satisfying? What we want is this, this and this...but what we really need is sanctification.

Husbands are supposed to love their wives as Christ loves the church, and wives are supposed to submit to their husbands like the church submits to Christ. Now let me ask you two questions:

1. Is it easy for Christ to love the church? Is the church so wonderful and perfect, and that's why Jesus loves the church so much? No. So as husbands, we should follow Christ's example and our commitment to love our wives shouldn't be based on their perfection.
2. Is it easy for the church to submit to Christ? You're all part of the church. Does it seem easy to do what Jesus wants all the time?

I love marriage. I love being married. But the fact is, marriage is for our sanctification. God gave us marriage as a blessing, but He also gave us marriage to help meet our spiritual needs...b/c He cares more about our spiritual condition than our physical condition.

I want to give you an example of all this from the Old Testament. I want to take your minds back to a time in Israel's history, and that's when they were brought out of Egypt and into the wilderness. There's something interesting that you see repeated over-and-over again during that time: God deliberately put Israel in difficult, trying situations:

- It started as soon as He led them out of Egypt. **Exo 13:18 God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea.** Think about that: God brought them to a place where they'd be pinched by the Red Sea in front of them and the Egyptian army behind them.
- Repeatedly He put them in situations where they didn't have water.
- He put them in situations where they didn't have food.
- He put them in situations where they had to face physical enemies like Arad, Sihon, Og, and spiritual enemies like Balaam and the Moabites
- He exposed them to dangerous animals and snakes.

It's almost like, *"God, why did you bring them out of Egypt, but then allow them to experience so much difficulty? If you were going to miraculously give them water and food and victories over their enemies ANYWAY, why didn't you just do that first so they didn't have to go through all that hardship?"*

You get the answer right before they entered the Promised Land. Deuteronomy contains Moses' three farewell speeches to the nation when they were on the east side of the Jordan only days away from taking the land. Moses couldn't go w/ them, so he had these wonderful, encouraging, challenging words after decades of being their leader. In **Deut 8**, in one of the first chapters of the Bible I ever read – it was a chapter I had marked w/ a post-it for years in my first Bible b/c Elwyn had showed it to me 10 yrs ago – Moses explained what God was doing...Moses explained all these hardships He put in their lives...

- **Deut 8:3 He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know...that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD...**(He did this to get their minds off the physical and onto the spiritual) **⁵ You should know in your heart that as a man chastens his son, so the LORD your God chastens you.**
- **Deut 8:15 [He] led you through that great and terrible wilderness, in which were fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty land where there was no water; [He] brought water for you out of the rock; ¹⁶ [He] fed you with manna, which your fathers did not know, THAT HE MIGHT HUMBLE YOU AND THAT HE MIGHT TEST YOU, TO DO YOU GOOD IN THE END.**

And that's it; that's the answer for trials: that He might humble us and do us good in the end. That's God's desire through trials. That's what we really need.

Now before we move on, I need to point out that there are basically two types of trials we experience:

- There are the trials God allows in our lives that are just part of being a Christian, and sort of come w/ the territory.
- Then there's another type of trial we experience, and it's the trial we bring on ourselves. It's the trial we go through b/c of our disobedience. 1 Peter is the book that really discusses these trials:
 - **1 Pet 2:20 What credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently?**
 - **1 Pet 3:17 It is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.**
 - **1 Pet 4:15 Let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters.**

So don't mistake trials for consequences.

(PART I) GOD FOCUSES ON OUR SPIRITUAL NEEDS (PART II) AND THE GREATEST IS FORGIVENESS...

Whenever we go to the doctor we all have the same hopes and fears: *"Please figure out what's wrong with me. Please don't misdiagnose me."* Luke is a physician, but you didn't have to know anything about medicine to look at this man and know what was wrong w/ him. In one moment, anyone could make the diagnosis about his paralysis. So I don't know if there's ever been anyone in history who felt more misdiagnosed than this man.

But here's the thing: Jesus didn't misdiagnose him. Jesus knew what his greatest need was and that's what He addressed. Despite how terrible this man looked physically, he was an infinitely worse condition spiritually: his sins hadn't been forgiven.

Game shows often give people consolation prizes: it's the prize you get for not winning the real prize. This paralytic felt like he received the consolation prize: *"Oh...my sins are forgiven...thanks. This is just what I've always wanted."*

Sometimes I think we feel like God is giving us the consolation prize when He doesn't answer our prayers the way we're want. We're like, *"Oh...wow...great...thanks: more trials"* ...when the Bible does actually say to rejoice in them!

God knows what we need, and so even though we might feel like we're being given the consolation prize, what God is actually giving us is WAY better than what we THINK we should have. Henry Ward Beecher said, *"By trials God is shaping us for higher things."*

Now what's really great is when Jesus gave this man what looked like the consolation prize, He was communicating something really wonderful to everyone looking on – and that would've been a LOT of people: remember they had to go on the roof b/c it was so crowded – and what Jesus communicated was the healing of this man's soul, was more important than the healing of his body.

- If Jesus healed him physically, it would benefit him temporarily.
- But if Jesus healed him spiritually, it would benefit him eternally.

Something that should encourage all of us when we struggle physically - or any time our bodies are hurting – is if our sins are forgiven, despite how we might feel, we're in wonderful condition.

I wrestled Lane Newburn during Friday School and it took me hours to recover. I'm feeling what it's like to get older too.

(PART I) GOD FOCUSES ON OUR SPIRITUAL NEEDS (PART II) AND THE GREATEST IS FORGIVENESS (PART III) WHICH EVERYONE NEEDS...

While I was working on this sermon and thinking about Jesus forgiving this man, something struck me: the man is paralyzed.

- What kind of wickedness could he have really engaged in?
- How wicked could he really have been?
- What kind of terrible sins could a paralyzed man commit?

My guess is he probably lived – what would be in our minds – a pretty non-evil life.

But please make sure you notice what Jesus DIDN'T do:

- Jesus didn't play down this man's sins.
- Jesus didn't say, *"This man is paralyzed and has hardly done anything worthy of judgment."*
- Jesus didn't say, *"Yes this man needs forgiveness, but not nearly as much as REALLY bad people."*
- Jesus didn't say, *"There are really, really evil sinners, and then there are people who have only sinned a little...and THIS is a man who has only sinned a little."*

Some commentators speculate the man probably couldn't even talk; that's how little potential he had for sin...AND HE STILL NEEDED forgiveness. Can you imagine how much those of us who CAN talk need forgiveness?

When Jesus said, "Your sins are forgiven" He was communicating two things very, very clearly:

1. First, this man was a sinner.
2. Second, this man needed forgiveness.

Jesus' words actually communicated that this man's sins WERE serious. Jesus was saying, *"You're a sinner who needs to be forgiven!"* This is why in **Romans 3** you see:

- **Verse 10 There is no one righteous, not even one.**
- **Verse 23 All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.**

If you looked at this man, I know what you would've felt: pity. Two of the most pitiful individuals in Scripture are in this chapter: the leper in verses 12 to 16, and now this man.

So it also struck me that Jesus didn't say, *"This man doesn't need forgiveness b/c he's paralyzed and I feel so sorry for him that I'm not going to hold his sins against him. I have so much pity for him"*

there's no way he should ever be punished! His life has been so miserable, he should be able to go to heaven b/c he's already suffered so much!" Jesus didn't say that, and again it just shows us, forgiveness is something everyone needs.

Sometimes there's a belief that if people have suffered enough in this life, they don't really need forgiveness. They should just be able to go to heaven b/c of how bad things have been for them...but that's not true. There are some people who have suffered terribly in this life - suffering I'm sure I can't even imagine - but they need forgiveness just as much as anyone else.

The point is there are no people who are so good or so great...or so poor and so helpless that they don't need forgiveness.

Let me share a really fascinating verse w/ you from Revelation 20, but first let me explain the context...

The Great White Throne is where all unbelievers throughout history are judged at the end of time. It's recorded for us in Rev 20. There are only about 6 verses discussing the Great White Throne, but they are the most terrifying verses in Scripture b/c they are the verses about people who have to stand before Christ and be judged by Him AFTER spending a lifetime rejecting Him. Then they're cast alive into the Lake of Fire.

The one verse I want to share w/ you is verse 12. It's the verse describing all the unbelievers throughout history standing before the throne. It says **I saw the dead, SMALL AND GREAT, standing before God.** The words **small and great** describe all the unbelievers to be judged:

- It doesn't matter if they're **great**. That means it doesn't matter if they're rich, or powerful, or strong, or famous, you name it. The example I always think of from the OT is Job. Job was a GREAT man. **Job 1:3** says he **was the greatest of all the people of the East**. He offered sacrifices for his kids' sins, just IN CASE they sinned. That's a great man. But when he met God, he didn't feel too great anymore.
- It also says the **small** are there. That means it doesn't matter if you were poor in this life, or insignificant, or weak, or feeble...or even completely paralyzed like this man. The truth is if Jesus didn't forgive this paralyzed man's sins he would've joined this group at the Great White Throne.

And here's why...

- **Deut 10:17 For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality.**
- **Rom 2:11 For there is no partiality with God.**
- **Acts 10:34 Peter said, "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality."**

There's no partiality w/ God: everyone needs forgiveness.

Now we've reached the part of this story that has really become my favorite part...this is why we still haven't gotten past verse 20 after two weeks, I kept seeing these different things...

We're going to talk about the religious leaders in more detail next week, but let me tell you something about them so we can wrap up verse 20 and really appreciate the greatness of it...

The religious leaders taught righteousness by works. They taught that a man could be forgiven only by engaging in some amount of religious activity. So when Jesus told this man that his sins were forgiven, it flew in the face of all their teaching.

Picture the scene: for years the religious leaders have taught that if you want to be good, and if you want to be forgiven, you've got to keep the law and perform an almost unimaginable amount of religious behavior...religious behavior that went beyond God's Law...the Law was a standard man already couldn't keep, and the religious leaders added even more. Then Jesus tells this man who couldn't engage in any religious activity that his sins were forgiven. The idea that this man could be forgiven when he had done absolutely nothing to earn it, completely opposed their teaching.

But that was the reality of it: this man had done absolutely nothing to deserve forgiveness. He couldn't even get himself before Jesus on his own; he had to be carried. That's how little this man had done.

One of the reasons I think this is so important, is the two most prominent lies of the devil are...

1. First, you're a good person.
2. Second, if you have done anything wrong, you can make up for it. You can do good things, to make up for the bad things you've done. In other words, you can provide for your own forgiveness.

It isn't just the world that thinks this. Unfortunately, this is the false Gospel of every single works-based religion. It's the lie that:

- You can save yourself.
- You can provide for your own forgiveness.
- It's the lie that every single false, works-based religion teaches and embraces as the Gospel.

Some years ago I watched a 1986 film called *The Mission*. In it Robert De Niro kills a man, feels guilty about what he did, confesses it to a Catholic priest who challenges him to make up for it. The next thing you know he becomes a Catholic missionary and he's shown climbing mountains in the South American jungle pulling a huge bundle of armor and weapons for no other reason than he thinks afflicting himself like this, and making himself miserable, makes up for the sins he committed. He helps a group of missionaries establish a Catholic mission and at the end of the movie he dies defending it. So it's supposed to be this wonderful, heroic movie, b/c Robert De Niro redeemed himself. He provided for his own forgiveness. He became a good man.

The movie was nominated for 7 Academy Awards, including Best Picture, and was a huge hit.

There's just one problem: the theme of the movie is a complete lie. Robert De Niro wasn't forgiven for anything b/c we could never sacrifice enough to provide for our own forgiveness. You can spend years afflicting yourself in the South American jungle...and you can become a missionary...and you

can set up a mission...and you can even die defending that mission, but you still won't be any closer to being forgiven, b/c THAT'S NOW HOW SINS ARE FORGIVEN! And if you think about it, if sins were forgiven that way, who would get all the glory? Who got all the glory in the movie? Robert De Niro: it was all about him; all about what he did; all about how he earned it; all about how he suffered; it was all about his sacrifice. Nothing about Christ.

The Mission is #1 on Church Time's top 50 Religious Films list. Can you tell me how a movie that completely twists the Gospel can be the number 1 religious film of all time? This shows us two things:

1. First, it shows just how ingrained it is in us to think that we can earn forgiveness.
2. Second, it shows there are a LOT of people – and probably churches – that don't really understand the Gospel.

(PART I) GOD FOCUSES ON OUR SPIRITUAL NEEDS (PART II) AND THE GREATEST IS FORGIVENESS (PART III) WHICH EVERYONE NEEDS (PART IV) AND CAN HAVE BY FAITH.

You can't do anything to obtain for forgiveness, but you can receive it by faith. And that's why this paralyzed man who had done absolutely nothing, received forgiveness

If you want to know what the Gospel looks like, it looks like this story w/ the paralytic:

- A man who could do absolutely nothing to save himself...
- A man who could do absolutely nothing to earn forgiveness...
- Receives forgiveness b/c he has the one thing that's necessary for forgiveness, and that is faith.

Rom 4:5 to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness. This paralyzed man didn't work...He knew he couldn't even if he wanted to. All he could do was believe, and he did, and that faith was accounted to him for righteousness.

This man is saved or forgiven by grace through faith, not of himself, it was clearly the gift of God, not of works, and that is the Gospel.

The Latin word *sola*, means "alone"; it's related to our word "solo." The Five Solas of the Reformation are:

1. *Sola scriptura*: "Scripture alone"
2. *Sola fide*: "faith alone"
3. *Sola gratia*: "grace alone"
4. *Solo Christo*: "Christ alone"
5. *Soli Deo gloria*: "to the glory of God alone"

Let me just explain on two of the solas...

“Faith alone” excludes any works from being necessary for salvation. It’s the teaching that justification, or being declared righteous by God is received by faith only, apart from anything we could do.

“Grace alone” excludes the merit done by a person to achieve salvation; it is the teaching that salvation comes by divine grace, or unmerited favor only, not as something the sinner could do to earn it in his own effort. It’s the idea that salvation is a free gift.

Now, I would say in these short verses we have one of the best pictures in the entire Bible of faith alone and grace alone: this paralyzed man was clearly forgiven and saved by grace through faith alone. There was nothing he could do. There was nothing he had done:

- There’s nothing he could add to his faith.
- There’s nothing he could’ve done to make this anything except grace alone.

Earlier I said when Jesus told this man his sins were forgiven, it was communicating to everyone watching that if this man needed forgiveness, they did too. But there was something else I think Jesus’ words communicated and it’s this...

If this man who had done absolutely nothing, could be forgiven, then so could all of them...and so could all of us. That is, as long as we have the one thing that this man had, and that’s genuine, saving faith.

Sometimes people start to question their salvation:

- They question if they’ve done enough.
- They question if they’ve been good enough.
- This man hadn’t done anything.
- But he had the one thing necessary for salvation and that was faith.

Let’s review the insert...

(PART I) GOD FOCUSES ON OUR SPIRITUAL NEEDS (PART II) AND THE GREATEST IS FORGIVENESS (PART III) WHICH EVERYONE NEEDS (PART IV) AND CAN HAVE BY FAITH.

After the closing song Jesse and Mary are going to come up for the dedication of their son son, Owen James, and then we’re going to introduce new members.