

Luke 5:20-26

Sermon: **The teaching of Jesus vs. The teaching of Pharisees #2**

2023.

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MY EARS THAT HEAR AND MY EYES THAT SEE

1. (Luke 5:20) *"And when He saw their faith, He said: 'Man, your sins are forgiven you.'"*

1.1. Let us return to the word "saw."¹ When Jesus "saw" their faith, what exactly did He recognize was happening in that moment? I believe this: *"Here is a group of men without fear, with great desire and persistence, who are determined to come to Me. They do not care about the Pharisees, nor about the great crowd pressing around Me. At any cost they want to reach the Messiah. Their action, done before Me, before My disciples, before the Pharisees and the rest of the people, proves that they believe I am the One sent by God. Surely My Father has forgiven them—what else could be true, since with unstoppable determination they sought to come to Me, and in the end they succeeded!"* My suggestion here is that Jesus "saw" that these men had been forgiven of their sins. Their actions (their fruits) testified that God had forgiven them!

1.2. Is the ability that Jesus shows here unique to Him or not? My short answer would be: both yes and no. No one is like Jesus—He is a unique man. His sinlessness makes Him sharper, clearer, more open in understanding what God wants to accomplish in this reality. On the other hand, our sinfulness often blinds us from discerning which path is God's and which is not. The intimacy between Jesus and His Father is, for us ordinary sinners, impossible to fully grasp.

- And Jesus, as the unique Son of God, has an authority that we do not and cannot have. -

1.3. Let us move forward. Could Jesus act apart from His Father's will? Jesus Himself says in this passage: *"The Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins!"* Does this mean that Jesus could forgive sins whenever He wanted, whomever He wanted? Could He act entirely on His own, apart from the Father's will? Scripture gives us answers to these questions. In Matthew 25:34 Jesus tells the people that when the Son of Man comes and establishes His kingdom, the kingdom will belong to

¹ Sermon 28, § 3.4.

those whom His Father predestined before the foundation of the world, those whom the Father has blessed. The apostle Peter tells us in Acts 2:22 that God the Father confirmed who the man Jesus of Nazareth was through signs and wonders. Likewise, in Luke 7:9 we read that Jesus was astonished at the faith of the centurion. Question: why would Jesus, if He were God who has authority to forgive sins on earth, be “astonished” at the faith of this centurion? Why would Jesus, who knows all things and knows what will happen next, ever be surprised by anything?

1.4. To gain a clearer picture of who Jesus truly was, we must be open to questions and to re-examining our long-held beliefs. We must try to set aside the church lenses through which we have looked since childhood. We must be passionate explorers, sincerely desiring to uncover the true picture of who Jesus was! Do not these very verses above call us to do exactly that?

1.5. When we try to understand the thoughts of the apostles and the biblical authors themselves, we see that their perspectives often stand in sharp contrast to church theology. They understood far better the relationship between God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. Personally, I am more inclined to trust them than church theology. For this reason, I believe Jesus did not have, in and of Himself, the authority to forgive sins—in line with God’s plan and His will, yes, but not independently. In other words, Jesus had authority to declare whose sins were forgiven because, of all the people who have ever walked this earth, He knew the Father best.

1.6. When Jesus tells the Pharisees that He has authority to forgive sins, what He is really saying is this: *“My eyes, which see, and My ears, which hear, give Me the authority to discern whom My Father has forgiven and whom He has not. You Pharisees, through your theological convictions, have completely missed the truth about who will receive God’s mercy and who will not! The lenses through which you look are leading you to ruin—and those who follow you as well! God loves those who come before Him with broken and contrite hearts. God does not love the self-righteous who believe they are worthy of His mercy!”*

WHAT ABOUT US?

2. Likewise, I believe that we, ordinary sinners to whom God has chosen to give the gift of grace, can also recognize whom God has chosen to forgive and whom He has not. Unlike Jesus, who is sinless, we—who are sinful—are prone to make a mistake in our conclusion about who has been forgiven and who has not, and we must always keep that in mind! Only the time we spend with someone—their choices, their fruits, the values they promote—can show us whether that person’s sins have been forgiven or not. God’s will, which Jesus understood as truth but the Pharisees did not, is not unreachable for the rest of us, God’s children.

2.1. To prove my statement above, let us go together to **(Acts 8:9–23)** *“Now there was a man in that city named Simon. He practiced sorcery and amazed the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great. And all the people, from the least to the greatest, paid close attention to him, saying, ‘This man is the Power of God that is called Great.’ They followed him because for a long time he had astounded them with his magic. But when they believed Philip, who preached the Good News about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Even Simon himself believed and was baptized, and he stayed constantly with Philip. Seeing the great signs and wonders taking place, he was beside himself with amazement.*

When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. When they arrived, they prayed for the Samaritans that they might receive the Holy Spirit, for He had not yet fallen on any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. When Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying: 'Give me also this authority so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.' But Peter replied to him: 'May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! You have no part or share in this ministry, for your heart is not right before God. Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity.'"

2.1.1. We read that in Samaria there was a man named Simon. He was a sorcerer about whom many in the people said that he was "the Power of God." When Philip came to preach the Gospel in Samaria, many believed his message. Swept up in the euphoria of the crowds, Simon the sorcerer also decided to become a follower of Jesus Christ—that is, to become a believer. In other words, Simon the sorcerer became a member of the apostolic church (community). The text tells us that he was constantly by Philip's side.

2.2. After some time the apostles Peter and John went down to Samaria to lay hands on the people who had believed the Good News proclaimed by Philip. The text says that the Holy Spirit came upon them. Seeing this, Simon the sorcerer asked the apostles to give him that power also. He even wanted to pay them to receive such authority. In Simon's words, Peter recognized the state of his heart. In other words, Peter knew that his sins had not been forgiven. How did he know? Peter knew that the one whom God has forgiven would not seek power or glory for himself.

2.3. Unlike the people in the Gospel of Luke who truly understood who Jesus was and why He came, who tirelessly, courageously, and with humble hearts pressed forward in their desire to see Him, Simon believed that he could buy God's favor. His heart was not rightly oriented. For this reason Peter—unlike Jesus, who said: "*Your sins are forgiven!*"—says to Simon the sorcerer in Acts 8:20–21: "*May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! You have neither part nor share in this matter, for your heart is not right before God.*"

2.4. The question arises: what is the difference between the theological conviction of the Pharisees and the conviction of Simon the sorcerer? I believe there is none! At their very core they are the same! While Simon believed he could „buy“ God's grace, the Pharisees believed they „deserved“ God's grace. Neither Simon the sorcerer nor the Pharisees were truly willing to admit what they were before God—helpless, sinful human beings who do not deserve His mercy. And that is why the Pharisees had no authority to recognize whom God had forgiven and whom He had not.

2.5. On the other hand, the apostle Peter understood the truth that Jesus had taught him, namely: "*It is God who decides whom He will forgive. It is the gift of God; it does not come from men.*" And for this reason the apostle Peter had authority to recognize whom God the Father had forgiven and whom He had not.

FORGIVENESS OF SINS IS AN INVISIBLE REALITY

3. Ok, let's move on. (Luke 5:23–25) *“Which is easier to say: Your sins are forgiven you, or to say: Get up and walk? 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.’ Immediately he stood up in front of them, picked up what he had been lying on, and went home praising God.”*

3.1. Why does Jesus ask the Pharisees this question? I believe it's for this reason: he knows that the Pharisees can deny the truth he has just declared in front of everyone. Why? Because forgiveness of sins is an “invisible reality.” Any one of us—if skilled at persuading others—could try to pull off that claim. The church itself (and here I mean every Christian denomination throughout history) has convinced, and still convinces, its members that if they belong to their fold, then their sins are forgiven.

3.2. Jesus knows the thoughts of the Pharisees. He knows they believe that if someone isn't part of their movement, then they are unworthy of God's forgiveness. And because of their false belief, Jesus wants to “visually prove” before all that his theological understanding is true, and theirs is false! How does he do it? He tells the paralyzed man: *“Get up and walk!”* And in the sight of all present, the paralyzed man rose and glorified God! At that moment, no one—not even the Pharisees or teachers of the Law—could deny that what Jesus taught was the truth.

- In other words, God the Father, through this miracle, confirmed to his people that the teaching of his Son, Jesus Christ, was the true one, and the teaching of the Pharisees false.-

3.3. Someone might suggest that God healed this man because he believed Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God, and that anyone who believes will also be healed if sick. I disagree with that assumption. What we must take from this event is this: God's primary purpose is to be consistent with his plan. *“I, as God, have sent my Son, Jesus Christ, to proclaim to the world the one and only truth about me. He alone fully knows who I am and what my plan is for this reality. In this event, where my Son dismantles the Pharisees' theological claims and human traditions, I will, through the healing of a paralyzed man, prove that my Son alone knows the real truth.”*

3.4. Human tradition, unfortunately, didn't end with the Pharisees of that time. It has existed universally for thousands of years—in Christianity and in countless other religious and philosophical systems. Theoretically speaking, if Jesus appeared today in the midst of this ocean of human traditions, I believe he would confront them too with the theological falsehoods they promote.

A GOOD KIND OF FEAR

4. (Luke 5:26) *“Everyone was astonished and gave glory to God. They were filled with awe and said: ‘We have seen remarkable things today.’”*

4.1. We read that everyone present was filled with fear because of the miracle they had witnessed. Why were they afraid? What kind of fear is this exactly? I believe each person was afraid because that day they came face-to-face with themselves. After this event, all the human traditions they had

trusted up until then became irrelevant and invalid. *“Today, I—as someone who was present at this event—must make a decision: What will I do with what I have just seen and heard?”*

4.2. It’s easy to deny or distort the truth if we haven’t witnessed it ourselves. It’s easy to reject something when it reaches us through a tenth-hand story passed on by word of mouth. But these people here couldn’t do that—they had seen with their own eyes, and therefore they couldn’t deny it! I believe the author here is speaking of a good kind of fear. Of course, it depends on perspective: it’s good for those who decided to examine themselves and, based on what they saw and heard, personally commit to believing in Jesus’ teaching.

4.3. Finally, the fear of God must exist in the life of a believer. When we grasp who God is—that he is the very author of our lives, that he is the one who decides whether we will be blessed or not, whether we will inherit eternal, uncorrupted life or not—that fear protects us from ourselves, from straying down the path that leads to certain death. A person who has no fear of God will not walk God’s path. Such a person walks their own way—the way of destruction. A child of God, on the other hand, both honors and loves their Father, but also fears him, knowing what the Father is capable of. And precisely because of that fear, they obey him. And in obeying the Father, they become heirs of the kingdom alongside their King, Jesus Christ.