

# UNLEASHING THE POWER OF GOD

LUKE 5:16-26

*The Christian Walk Is A Walk Of Faith That Is Constantly Looking For The Hand Of God And Inviting God To Work In Our Lives.*

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# Unleashing The Power Of God

Luke 5:16-26

I realize that it seems as if we are crawling through the Gospel of Luke. Part of that is intentional on my part. Since I think the Gospel is so beautiful and so powerful, I would like to make sure everyone hears it, understands it, and receives it. I really do feel the same way about the Gospel as the Apostle Paul when he said:

“16For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes—Jews first and also Gentiles. 17This Good News tells us how God makes us right in his sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. As the Scriptures say, ‘It is through faith that a righteous person has life’” (Romans 1:16-17 / NLT).

Please hear this message over and over again as we study through the Gospel of Luke. God does not need people of great intelligence, great accomplishments, great wealth, or great status. God is looking for men and women who are willing to exercise even the smallest amount of faith to trust Him to change our lives. Jesus said that if we even had faith the size of a mustard seed, we could tell mountains to throw themselves into the sea and they would.

When we face difficult times in life, when we struggle with grief, sorrow, frustration, betrayal, sickness, and setbacks of all kinds, Jesus asks us to place our faith in Him. This morning’s text is going to show us how we access God’s power and blessings. When I did my internship in New Jersey, there were many Salvation Army women stationed throughout the area. At services, the women would get up, start waving their handkerchiefs, and shout Hallelujah. I used to love to watch their enthusiasm and faith. Did you ever know a lady like that?

An elderly lady was well-known for her faith and for her boldness in talking about it. She would stand on her front porch and shout "PRAISE THE LORD!"

Next door to her lived an atheist who would get so angry at her proclamations he would shout, "There ain't no Lord!!"

Hard times set in on the elderly lady, and she prayed for GOD to send her some assistance. She stood on her porch and shouted "PRAISE THE LORD. GOD I NEED FOOD!! I AM HAVING A HARD TIME. PLEASE LORD, SEND ME SOME GROCERIES!!"

The next morning the lady went out on her porch and noted a large bag of groceries and shouted, "PRAISE THE LORD."

The neighbor jumped from behind a bush and said, "Aha! I told you there was no Lord. I bought those groceries, God didn't."

The lady started jumping up and down and clapping her hands and said, "PRAISE THE LORD. He not only sent me groceries, but He made the devil pay for them. Praise the Lord!"

## I. THE POWER OF PRAYER

You know, sometimes I think we get so caught up in religion, that we miss the fact that Christianity is all about relationship. The main idea of this morning’s text is this. THE

CHRISTIAN WALK IS A WALK OF FAITH THAT IS CONSTANTLY LOOKING FOR THE HAND OF GOD AND INVITING GOD TO WORK IN OUR LIVES. In other words, the Christian life is not about following rules and regulations and it is not even about the spiritual disciplines. The Christian life is one where we walk together with our lover, Jesus.

### **Prayer (16)**

I think a way we can understand this concept better is if we take a look at the power of prayer in verses 16-17. Here we see that CHRISTIANS ACCESS GOD'S POWER BY FAITH. In verse 16, we are introduced to the nature of prayer. Here it says that Jesus often got alone to pray. I think that we are often confused by the word prayer. In other words, we want to know how to pray, what to pray for, and most of all, if we are doing it enough and doing it correctly. Should I pray standing up, sitting down, kneeling down, or lying face down on the floor?

I would like to make this as simple as possible. Since we are mostly adults here, let me ask you this, "Have you ever been in love?" For those of us who have been married for a long time, have we come to understand love in the context of our relationship with our husbands or wives? For those of us who remember what it means to be in love and have grown in our love over the years, it becomes a good analogy for prayer and the other spiritual disciplines. Listen, when Luig and I were young, I took all modes of transportation through all sorts of circumstances, in all types of weather, at all times of the day, so that we could be together. I flew on rickety planes, rode on cattle trains, to towns where they had never seen an American ... all to be with her. These days, I enjoy a day of shopping with her, going on a walk with her, and we enjoy going away on vacation together, just to be alone and away. That's the thing about being in love and with the one you love. It doesn't matter where you are or what you're doing. Many times, you don't even need to speak.

That's the idea I want you to get about prayer. Since God lives in us and is with us always, we can get alone with Him any time. We can be sitting in the Mall, driving, walking, or just grabbing a quiet moment and glancing towards Him. We can go to a study, a bedroom, a closet, or in the basement. The purpose of spiritual disciplines is to usher us into communion with God. Sometimes I think we get overly fixated on the disciplines themselves and miss the whole point of communing with God. There is nothing holy about simply praying, reading the Bible, fasting, or any of the other disciplines. They are merely tools that usher us into the presence of God. Jesus made it a practice of trying to get away, and get alone with God. I want to challenge all of us this morning. Take a relatively typical day, and purpose to meet God throughout the day. Look for those moments where you can just glance towards God and show your love. We do that simply by turning our thoughts and attention towards Him. You'll find that during a typical day, you could find yourself thinking about Him quite a bit. That's prayer. Jesus was constantly turning His attention to God, even in the midst of routine tasks like eating, planning, and working. As we learn to live in the presence of God, we will find ourselves in continual prayer.

### **Observation (17a)**

It is easy to become proud when we practice the spiritual disciplines or become involved with a lot of religious stuff. In the first half of verse 17 let's observe some people who came to make an observation concerning Jesus. At this point, Luke introduces us to the Pharisees and Scribes. Those of us who have been Christians for a long time immediately recognize that these are two groups of people who are enemies of Jesus. And we easily dismiss them as such. However, if you were to do even a little research on them, you would be surprised to see how much in common we church people have with them. They were a group of Jews who were dissatisfied with how secular and worldly the Jewish religion had become. They believed that the Babylonian captivity the Jews suffered was a direct result of them not faithfully following the commandments of God. And they were correct.

And so they separated themselves from watered down forms of Judaism and they separated themselves from being contaminated by secular society. They met in small gatherings and they dedicated themselves to following the commandments of God. They dedicated themselves to studying the Old Testament books and the oral tradition and commentary that grew up alongside it called the Mishna. They were so dedicated to not breaking any commandments, that they made rules that would prevent them from even getting to a place where they would be close to breaking the law. They developed a system consisting of 613 laws. 248 were positive laws, in other words, "You should do this." There were 365 negative laws, in other words, "You shall not do this." They read and studied the Bible diligently. They prayed several times throughout the day. They went to church regularly, gave a tenth of all their income to the church, and did all sorts of volunteer work in the church and for the church. If they were members here at Devon, they would stand out as outstanding members. They lived very upright, godly lives, and they were very evangelistic about following God. They would no doubt stand out as godly people.

Two groups of people are mentioned here, Pharisees and Scribes. Let's start with the Pharisees. I have just described to you what Pharisees believed and how they lived. They mostly came from middle to middle upper class families. They were serious about living out their faith. They would be a lot like us evangelicals. In fact, a lot of their teachings were clearly in synch with Jesus'. The second group of people described here were probably also Pharisees. Only this group specialized in studying the religious laws and applying them to everyday situations. They were known as the Scribes. Here they are referred to teachers of the law. They were like the procedural lawyers.

At this point, we need to say two things. First of all, word about Jesus had been spreading. He was teaching and working miracles with authority that appeared to come from God and identify Him as the Promised Messiah of Israel. Secondly, Pharisees had come from all over Israel to see Jesus and to evaluate His authenticity.

Here is another little tidbit. It says they came and they were sitting. We have already seen that sitting was the accepted format for teaching and learning. However, sitting was also the posture for judging. They were coming to judge Jesus. They were there to either approve Him or denounce Him. I'm pretty sure that's the way some Christians come to church. They come to judge the songs and the message. They come to either approve of the music or disapprove it. They don't come to submit to the message the pastor preaches, they come to evaluate it. If they agree with it, they approve it. If they disagree with it, they disapprove it. The Scribes and Pharisees were not there to learn from Jesus, they came to observe Him and judge Him.

## **Power (17b)**

Even though they did not perceive this, the second half of verse 17 informs us that supernatural power was present. Jesus has been spending time with God The Father and Holy Spirit. And now Jesus found Himself in a place that God was choosing to manifest His power. The healing power of God was present, and Jesus sensed it and was ready to tap into it. You see, prayer is not so much an activity as it is knowing God. I know what my wife likes and what she doesn't. I know what I could buy her or give her that would make her happy. Learning to be with God will prepare us to see when His hand is moving and when He is about to act. It is at these times, that we need to humbly submit to His plan and allow Him to use us in it. All we need to do is respond in faith. Please be in constant prayer because you never know when or where God is going to display His power. CHRISTIANS ACCESS GOD'S POWER BY FAITH.

## **II. THE POWER OF FAITH**

By living in constant communion with God, we have seen the power of prayer. In verses 18-20 we will see the power of faith. Here we see that CHRISTIANS ACCESS GOD'S LOVE BY FAITH. When we turn Christianity into a religion and forget that it is a relationship, we miss God's love. God created us for the specific purpose of being in a personal and passionate love relationship with Him.

### **Faithful Friends (18-19)**

In verses 18-19 we see the faithful love of some faithful friends. This is one of the most personal Bible incidents for me because we had a group of friends, one who was a quadriplegic. This guy was a great guy. He was an up and coming actor when he got into an auto accident which severed his spine and left him a quadriplegic. He was certain that had it not been for the accident, he would have never come to know God. We took him everywhere we went; shopping, restaurants, bars, movies, everywhere. He was confined to a motorized wheelchair so everywhere we went, we would have to disassemble the chair and take it with us. Since he was a dwarf, we could easily manhandle him and throw him into the car. Believe me, we were never gentle but he was a pretty good sport.

In addition to taking him everywhere with us, we would often force him into public situations he wasn't comfortable with, and he would always let us know about it. I can easily see us being the friends described here. Some friends heard that Jesus was in town and that He was at a local house preaching and teaching. The friends went to their crippled friend and told them their plan to bring him to Jesus to be healed. Not wanting to be the center of attention and becoming some freak-show, I'm guessing the invalid said, "Not on your life," to which the friends ignored, threw him on a pallet, and carried him towards the house. Since we did stuff like this with our friend, I

can hear the cripple saying, “Come on you guys, this is not funny. Let’s go home,” to which the friends told him to just shut up as they kept walking.

Now, they arrived at the house to find that Jesus was there and He was teaching. However, there were so many people; they couldn’t get through the crowd. Showing some relief, the invalid now says, “Okay guys, we tried. It’s too crowded, let’s go home.” But to his surprise, his friends carry him around back and start to climb the stairs to the roof, balancing him on the stretcher, perhaps wobbling a bit and scaring him even more. When they get on the roof, they set him down and start to take off some of the roofing tiles. Next, they took a rope, tied it to the stretcher, and prepare to lower him down. When my friend used to get in these situations, his arms would spasm and he would start to shake uncontrollably. Of course it was funny to us. We would laugh and that would make him mad. I can picture the invalid yelling at his friends that this wasn’t funny and as they lowered him through the roof I can hear him say, “Whoa, this is not funny, not funny at all.” Now all the eyes in the room start to focus on him. Jesus looks up and sees this stretcher being lowered from the ceiling. Jesus is amazed and also can’t wait to see what or who is on this stretcher. All of a sudden, the paralytic finds himself face to face with Jesus. He and Jesus are now the center of attention.

My friend died about 5 years ago, and he is now truly face to face with Jesus and he is totally healed. Many people were involved in bringing him to faith in Jesus Christ. Many people were involved in bringing him to church every week and supporting him through college. This is our purpose in life. We are to bring people to Jesus. I can’t heal anyone. I can’t save anyone. I can’t fix anyone. But God can. Let us bring people to Jesus. There is no telling what He will do.

### **Noted By Jesus (20a)**

In the first half of verse 20 Jesus’ attention is drawn to the paralytic’s friends and their faith and love are noted by Jesus. Luke says that when Jesus saw the faith of the paralytic’s friends, He was moved to act. Note that in this case it is not the faith of the paralytic that is highlighted, but the faith of his friends. Jesus is both touched and moved by the faith and love of this man’s friends.

### **True Healing (20b)**

This faith and love moves Jesus to demonstrate a true healing in the second half of verse 20. Because of this Jesus looked at the paralytic and said, “Man, your sins are forgiven.” In some versions Jesus address the paralytic as friend or son. Actually the word in Greek is simply man. I can almost see Jesus looking at the paralytic and saying, “Man, you are lucky to have such friends; friends of faith, friends of love. Your sins are forgiven.” We are so results oriented, we may say, “Big deal, Jesus forgave him of his sins. Why didn’t Jesus heal him? I’d rather hear Him say get up and walk.”

That just shows how worldly we are. The paralytic would have felt his whole life that God was angry with him or his family did something to offend God. People would have looked at this paralytic as if he were a freak and outcast by God. For the paralytic to hear this from the lips of Jesus would have been the sweetest words anyone could hear. It would be enough to know that he was not outcast by God and that he was loved by God. The Hebrews have a word that means it would be enough. The word is Dayenu. During Passover, they sing a song about Israel's journey from slavery to the Promised Land. It has 15 stanzas. After each stanza, the congregation says, "Dayenu." It has statements such as this:

- 1) If He had brought us out of Egypt. (Dayenu)
- 2) If He had executed justice upon the Egyptians. (Dayenu)
- 3) If He had executed justice upon their gods. (Dayenu)
- 4) If He had slain their first born. (Dayenu)
- 5) If He had given to us their health and wealth. (Dayenu)
  
- 6) If He had split the sea for us. (Dayenu)
- 7) If He had led us through on dry land. (Dayenu)
- 8) If He had drowned our oppressors. (Dayenu)
- 9) If He had provided for our needs in the wilderness for 40 years. (Dayenu)
- 10) If He had fed us manna. (Dayenu)
  
- 11) If He had given us Shabbat. (Dayenu)
- 12) If He had led us to Mount Sinai. (Dayenu)
- 13) If He had given us the Torah. (Dayenu)
- 14) If He had brought us into the Land of Israel. (Dayenu)
- 15) He built the Temple for us. (Dayenu) It is enough.

Have we forgotten what Jesus rescued us from? Jesus rescued us from the fires of hell where we deserve to scream out in pain, find ourselves alienated from God, suffer, burn, and grind our teeth for eternity with no hope of relief. We deserve to burn in hell for eternity. So what does it matter if we can walk or sing or dance or run? What does it matter if we are perfectly healthy, have a wonderful family, and are rich? These things are meaningless if we are headed for an eternity in hell. To hear Jesus pronounce to him that his sins were forgiven were the most beautiful words anyone could ever hear. Let me bring it down to this statement and our response. Jesus died for our sins so we could be in an eternally right relationship with God. Our response should be, "Dayenu." The hymn says, "It is enough, that Jesus died, and that He died for me." How thankful are we for that? Is our thought always it is enough ... or give me more?

This paralytic was now made whole. He knew the love of his friends and now he knew the love of Jesus. And all the people in the town would now respect him because he had received a touch from Jesus. We must understand that the God of the universe passionately loves us and wants to shower us with His love. And it's simple. CHRISTIANS ACCESS GOD'S LOVE BY FAITH. I'm hoping that no one leaves here this morning feeling unloved. All you need to do is tell Jesus that you're sorry for your sins, that you want Him to forgive you of your sins, and ask Him to come into your heart. He will and you will have entered a passionate and personal love relationship like no other you have ever known. Don't wait.



### III. THE POWER TO HEAL

In verses 21-26 we can see that Jesus has the power to heal. CHRISTIANS ACCESS GOD'S HEALING HAND BY FAITH. God uses all sorts of ways to heal us. He uses doctors, medicine, pastors, and counselors. I want us to pay special attention to what follows because those of us who take our faith seriously and try to pursue holiness are always in danger of falling into this trap.

#### **Theological Assessment (21-23)**

In verses 21-23, theological assessment is made concerning what just happened.

Since the Pharisees read and studied their Bibles every day, and since they memorized it, and tried to apply it to their daily lives; they were pretty good theologians. In other words they knew what was right and wrong. Their theological reasoning went like this. Only God can forgive sins. Anyone other than God who claims to forgive sins is a liar and blasphemer. Their reasoning is perfect. Their theology is right on the money. In fact, their reasoning is exactly in line with what Jesus believes.

However, they left out an important part of the equation. Jesus is God. Let's review. Only God can forgive sins. Jesus forgave sins. Therefore, if Jesus was not God, He was a liar and a blasphemer. However, if Jesus was God, there would be no problem.

Jesus agrees with this theology and He proceeds to further their theological education. The first clue to the Pharisees that Jesus was more than just a man was that He could read their minds. He knew what was in their hearts. Here is the first warning for us religious people. Oftentimes we will do something or say something because we think nobody who knows us sees us. How stupid is that? The point is that God sees and hears everything. He even knows what's in our hearts. Who do we think we are fooling when we pretend to be holy and upright? Certainly not God.

Jesus presents them with a question, "Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'?" The answer is pretty simple. It's easier to say your sins are forgiven. No one could prove if it were really true or not. On the other hand, there is a lot to risk on saying get up and walk. Clearly if Jesus told the paralytic to get up and walk, and he just lay there, Jesus would be proved a fraud. On the other hand, Jesus has been teaching the Word of God with power and authority. He was presenting Himself as the Promised Messiah. If the paralytic gets up and walks, and since He can even read the minds of the people present, then wouldn't one have to start thinking that Jesus was the real deal?

Like I have said over and over again, those of us who take our faith walk seriously and try to pursue holiness, walk a dangerous road. We believe the right stuff and do a lot of right stuff. But it is not hard to slip into thinking that because we believe the right stuff, say the right stuff, and do religious stuff; that we are right with God. It is good to read and study the Bible. It is good to do good works. It is good to pray. But all those are meant to draw us closer in our



personal relationship with God. They are not ends in themselves. If we start to evaluate our faith by how many times a day we pray or read the Bible, or fast, or even based on how much money we give or good works we do, then we will miss the whole point of Jesus' work on the cross. He died so that we could be in a right relationship with God.

### **Theological Proof (24-25)**

And so in verses 24-25, Jesus provides them with theological proof. Jesus said that He was now about to prove that He could make good on His promise to forgive the paralytic of his sins by now healing him physically. He told the paralytic to get up, pick up his mat, and go home. The paralytic does exactly what Jesus told him to do. He stood up, he picked up his mat, and he went home. He went home praising God. Can you see the man and the friends who brought him there jumping, shouting, and high-fiving one another? That must have been some rowdy celebration. I want to point out a couple of things here. First of all, after Jesus commanded the paralytic, he immediately obeyed. When we hear and understand what Jesus is telling us and commanding us, we need to obey immediately. Secondly, if we are faithful and live faithful lives, bringing people to Jesus, they will be blessed. If you read and study through this story, this paralytic received salvation and healing based on nothing he did. Jesus forgave him for his sins because his friends acted out in love and faith. And then he was physically healed so Jesus could prove a theological point. That paralytic was one lucky guy. If we live godly lives, there is no telling what blessings God is going to start sloppily pouring out all over the place.

### **Theological Wonder (26)**

As verse 26 points out, all this will cause theological wonder to break out. The crowds went crazy. They were amazed. They were filled with awe. They gave praise to God. Here is where good works, and righteous deeds find their place. When we give money, when we do good works, when we live out lives of love, people will be blessed but all the attention is to be directed to God, not to us.

We need to live and love by faith. Because **CHRISTIANS ACCESS GOD'S HEALING HAND BY FAITH**. I wanted to preach at least 3 sermons from today's text, but I decided on this one. If we start to understand that Christianity is a relationship with God instead of some dead religion of do's and don'ts, then I will have accomplished what I set out to do this morning. **THE CHRISTIAN WALK IS A WALK OF FAITH THAT IS CONSTANTLY LOOKING FOR THE HAND OF GOD AND INVITING GOD TO WORK IN OUR LIVES.**

## **IV. SUMMARY**

I don't know who wrote this but I like the analogy:

*“An illustration of the balance between faith and works lies hidden within any tree. Leaves use up nutrients in the process of photosynthesis. As the leaves consume nutrients in the sap, a suction is formed, which draws more sap from the roots. Without the sap, the leaves and branches would die. But the continual flow of this sap comes only as it is used up by the work of the leaf.*

Likewise, through faith we draw life from Christ. But a continual supply of fresh spiritual nutrients depends on our willingness to ‘consume’ the old supply through our acts of obedience, through our works.”

Please start to look at every moment of life as an opportunity for God to teach us something, to make us something, or to use us for something. Let us walk in faith.