

Luke 5:12-32 – “Three Things About Jesus”

(Pew Bible Page: 861)

Intro: God loves to tell us stories! Have you noticed it? From the very first page, God begins to reveal Himself to us by telling us a story: How He created the world; how He made man in Adam and Eve; and why things are as messed up as they are, and what He is doing about that. The Bible has been given to us so that we can come to know who God is and understand what He is like. Anyone who has read the Bible carefully will notice an important fact: God reveals Himself to us most fully through the story of Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son. It is not an exaggeration to say that the most important use we can make of our Bibles is to see fully and carefully who God is by listening to the stories in the Gospels that speak to us about the life of Jesus. Today, I'd like to look with you at three stories from the life of Jesus; stories that will help us to see who God is and how He feels about sinners, like you and me.

Proposition: God loves the world so much that He is willing to cleanse us; able to forgive us; and seeking to save us.

(vv.12-16) Willing to Cleanse – Have you ever done something so hot, sweaty, filthy, and grimy that you couldn't wait to get home to the shower as quickly as possible? Those of us who have had the privilege of going to work in Mexico on one of the mission teams know exactly what that feels like! Most of our team members work all day at manual labor like digging ditches, roofing buildings, drywalling houses, painting, etc. After a day of that, most of us are very willing to head back to camp and hop in the shower. And we will do that, if only the shower has water. We are willing to be cleansed; but the showers aren't always willing to cooperate! In these verses, we find a man with a similar problem: He has leprosy; an incurable disease that is eating away at his body, and that makes him “unclean” and socially unacceptable in the company of the “clean” people in his community. But he has heard that this man, Jesus, might be able to make him clean. That's where we pick up the story: **Luke 5:12–16 - 12** *And it happened when He was in a certain city, that behold, a man who was full of leprosy saw Jesus; and he fell on his face and implored Him, saying, “Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.”* **13** *Then He put out His hand and touched him, saying, “I am willing; be cleansed.” Immediately the leprosy left him.* **14** *And He charged him to tell no one, “But go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as a testimony to them, just as Moses commanded.”* **15** *However, the report went around concerning Him all the more; and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by Him of their infirmities.* **16** *So He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed.* Jewish Law required that a man or woman who had leprosy had to keep themselves apart from those who did not have the disease. Leprosy is a “type” of Sin in Scripture. The physical disease itself is not sin but is a picture of Sin. It is incurable; debilitating and ultimately fatal to its victim, just as Sin is. The question in the beggar's mind is not, “Do I have leprosy,” but “Are you willing to cleanse me? Are you, Jesus, WILLING to make me clean?”

Jesus' response was immediate. He stretched out His hand to touch the leper. There is great significance in this. Under Old Testament Law, a person who was “clean” as Jesus was, who touched someone or something that was “unclean” immediately became unclean, ritually – not able to come into God's presence in the Temple until he performed the proper rites to make himself “clean” again. “Uncleanness” was the equivalent of spiritual death. When someone “clean” touched someone “unclean,” it is a picture of Sin, spiritual death, doing its work and spreading death to its victim. But Jesus has come to set death working backwards. In this case, when Jesus, the source of all “cleanness” touched the unclean leper, death got the shock of its life! The touch of the “clean” One undid death's power and the leper was made clean. Totally cleansed.

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Jesus left no doubt about His willingness to cleanse the leper. He said directly, *“I am willing; be cleansed.”*

[DOCTRINAL POINT] Many in our world today wonder if God is *willing* to make them clean. In Jesus, God demonstrates His willingness to cleanse us.

[ILLUSTRATION] As our nation retreats from the light of the knowledge of God and slips back into the darkness of paganism, many people are voicing skepticism over God’s interest in humanity in general and individuals in particular. This is not a new problem. The steady regression to deism we’re witnessing says, “Yes, God probably exists. But He is distant; unconcerned. He’s the great “watch maker” who created this universe, wound it up, set it running, and then lost interest in its progress. He’s left it to His creatures now. If anything is going to be done about disease, violence, poverty, and ignorance, it’s all up to us.” But this will never do! How could an all-knowing God, “forget” about His beloved creation? And even should such a thing occur, how could it possibly be that perishing humanity could somehow save itself by pulling on its own bootstraps? If this were possible, we would have done it by now. No. There must be another answer, and the answer is that God, in Christ, is willing to cleanse us.

[APPLICATION] Anyone who questions the goodness of God – His love for sinners – needs to hear that God is willing to cleanse the vilest among us. He has not abandoned his beloved. *“For God so loved the world,”* famously says John 3:16, but some among us can hardly believe that. Do you mean to tell us that God is willing to cleanse the pedophile? The trafficker? The alcoholic? The addict? The murderer? The blasphemer? Oh, my dear friend, it’s even more wonderful than that! He cleanses the proud. The gossip. The stingy. The petty. The one with a biting tongue. The short fused self-righteous one. It isn’t just “big” sins – it’s *your* sins He is willing to cleanse. In Jesus, God shows us that He is willing to cleanse you and me from *our* sins.

(VV.17-26) Able to Forgive – Some will think, “Jesus is willing to cleanse us, but is He really able to do that? Is He able to forgive my sins?” Like me, I’m sure you can think of many things you’d be willing to do if you only could! I’m willing to cure cancer; I’m willing to end poverty; I’d like to wipe racism from every human heart; I’m willing to evangelize the world! There is only one problem: it isn’t my willingness, it’s my weakness that spoils the plan! Our next story addresses the issue of human weakness – specifically our inability to find forgiveness unless God comes to our aid. **Luke 5:17–26 - 17** *Now it happened on a certain day, as He was teaching, that there were Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting by, who had come out of every town of Galilee, Judea, and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was present to heal them. 18 Then behold, men brought on a bed a man who was paralyzed, whom they sought to bring in and lay before Him. 19 And when they could not find how they might bring him in, because of the crowd, they went up on the housetop and let him down with his bed through the tiling into the midst before Jesus. 20 When He saw their faith, He said to him, “Man, your sins are forgiven you.” 21 And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, “Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?” 22 But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, He answered and said to them, “Why are you reasoning in your hearts? 23 Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Rise up and walk’? 24 But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins”—He said to the man who was paralyzed, “I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.” 25 Immediately he rose up before them, took up what he had been lying on, and departed to his own house, glorifying God. 26 And they were all amazed, and they glorified God and were filled with fear, saying, “We have seen strange things today!”* The question here is not one of

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willingness but of ability. Is Jesus *able* to forgive sins? After all, Jesus was to all appearances merely another one of us – a human being. Sure, He could say some wonderful things, and there seemed to be power to heal sicknesses working through Him, but, hey! Old Testament prophets could do the same thing! Everyone knew that only God could forgive sins. When Jesus, “*saw their faith*,” He said, “*Man, your sins are forgiven*,” setting off alarm bells in the hearts of the religious crowd that was listening in. “Did this fellow just claim to be God,” they wondered. That would be blasphemy – unless of course you really are God.

Let’s linger over this scene for a moment and make a few observations. Notice first that when Jesus saw faith, He immediately declared that the man’s sins had been forgiven. But it is one thing to SAY that sins are forgiven, and another perhaps for it to be so. How would the witnesses know for sure if it was true or not? You can’t see from the outside if sins have been washed away. Only God can see into the heart. Jesus wanted to prove beyond doubt that He had the power to forgive sins, so He provided evidence – a living demonstration to confirm His ability to forgive sins. He used “greater to lesser logic” to provide this proof. In greater to lesser logic, if the greater thing is proven to be true, then it follows that the lesser must necessarily be true also. So, Jesus asked the question: “*Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you’ or to say, ‘Rise and walk?’*” The answer, of course is that it’s easier to say, “*Your sins are forgiven*,” than to say, “*Rise and walk*,” because after all, who would know if sins had been forgiven or not by looking at the outside? But if someone said, “*Rise and walk*,” and it happened, you’d know immediately that this lesser thing, sins being forgiven, had happened too. So, if Jesus was able to heal the paralytic’s body, surely, He is able to forgive sins! And Jesus did exactly that: He healed the incurable physical condition of paralysis, proving that He is able also to forgive the paralytic’s sins.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] Many in our day wonder if Jesus is *able* to forgive their sins. In Christ, God demonstrates that He is able to forgive all our sins.

[ILLUSTRATION] Suppose you stood by the sea watching a mother and a small child playing together in the water, when suddenly, the mother stepped into an unseen hole and disappeared under the waves. As you watch, panic begins to rise in your heart; it becomes obvious that the mother, struggling to regain the surface, can’t swim. You see her child desperately trying to help. The little one wants to save mom; he’s willing; but there is no way that he is able. In just this same way, merely being willing isn’t enough; Jesus must also have the power to save us from our sins.

[APPLICATION] Anyone who questions God’s power to forgive sins needs to learn that God is not impotent in the face of man’s sinfulness. Not a few in our day believe God is captive to His own universe. “If God is really love,” they reason, “He wouldn’t allow sin to run rampant as is happening now before our very eyes.” “No,” they say. “God is *willing* to deal with evil in our world, yet evil goes on. So, it must be that though He is willing, He just isn’t able. He’s not powerful enough to deal with it. This is the only answer,” they say. This is foolishness masquerading as wisdom. Such people know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. The God who can call into being this vast universe in which we live and move and have our being, sustaining it with infinite energy, boundless resources – that God who has done the greater thing in Creation is surely able to do the lesser in your life and mine – forgive our sins. In Jesus, God shows us that He is able to forgive all our sins.

(vv.27-32) Present to Call – So, He is willing to cleanse us, and He is able to forgive us, but how can one get to Him? God is in heaven, and Jesus doesn’t seem to be here on earth. What good is willingness to cleanse and ability to forgive if one is separated from God? That’s the issue our next story deals with.

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Luke 5:27–32 - **27** After these things He went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, “Follow Me.” **28** So he left all, rose up, and followed Him. **29** Then Levi gave Him a great feast in his own house. And there were a great number of tax collectors and others who sat down with them. **30** And their scribes and the Pharisees complained against His disciples, saying, “Why do You eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” **31** Jesus answered and said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. **32** I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.” He is willing and He is able, but how can one get to Him? Obviously, we can’t. But what if He came to us just as He did to Levi? Levi was a tax collector – among the most despised sinners of his generation. Today we gripe about the I.R.S., but in reality, we don’t have much to complain about. In Jesus day, that wasn’t true. Tax collectors and prostitutes vied in the public’s imagination for the title, “worst of the worst.” Tax collectors bought permission from the Roman government, the occupying power – the enemy – to collect taxes owed to Rome, and also a hefty additional amount depending on how much they could squeeze out of their fellow citizens. It was the sleeziest business imaginable and no one wanted to associate with a tax collector. And then Jesus rocked their world by seeking out Levi and going to a banquet in his home. Unthinkable! Was Jesus willing to forgive even a tax collector? Was Jesus able to forgive even a traitor to his own nation? And notice Levi’s response when he heard Jesus’ call: he immediately left all behind and followed Jesus. Would Jesus really accept such a man? Invite him to be one of His disciples?

The point, of course, is this: Jesus was not only willing and able – He came SEEKING the opportunity to save such a one. Jesus made Himself present to call the lost. He still does. We cannot go to Him, so He still comes to us.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] Many in our day wonder if Jesus can really be found. In Christ, God has *come to us*, seeking to be found.

[ILLUSTRATION] It sometimes happens that a tourist, a day-hiker, gets lost in a national park. When that happens, the Rangers are willing to help and are well prepared to do the work. How strange would it be if they decided that the best course of action was for them to remain in their offices, hoping for the best? Would they do that? Certainly not! You can count on them to go out, seeking the one who is lost. Surely, we can’t imagine that God would be less diligent in seeking the lost sinner than a Park Service Ranger seeking a lost hiker.

[APPLICATION] Anyone who questions God’s nearness to save needs to hear that in Jesus, God has come seeking and saving those who are lost. God is not distant from us, hiding away behind some far away galaxy, hoping everything will work out just fine without anyone having to find their way to Him and break the silence in which He is cloaking Himself. Oh, no! The unsearchable One; the unreachable One, in Jesus has come seeking us. He is present to call the lost to salvation. He is, in fact, so near that he is present among us this morning. He has come down to us today through His Word and His Spirit, pleading with sinners, saying, “Follow me!” I wonder, have you heard His call? Will you, like Levi, leave everything behind and invite into the home of your heart the One who has come to save you? If not, why not? He is willing to cleanse you. He is able to forgive you. He is present to call you. Any resistance is on *your* side. If you are not saved, it will be no one’s fault but yours in the end. Why not now? Why not today?

Conclusion: God loves to tell stories. Today, we’ve looked at three stories from the life of Jesus that reveal to us who God is and how He feels about sinners like you and me. God is not distant. He is not

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reluctant. He is not impotent. God is mighty to save, and He has come to you today inviting you to put your trust in Him.