

And I Bear It No More

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[0 : 0 0] inerrant and life-giving words. And friends, I would ask you just now to keep that section of Scripture open, to have it at the tips of your fingers, to have it there. And how about this?

How about we begin this morning's sermon with some hymn lyrics? Let's begin like that. Let's see if you recognize these. What love could remember, no wrongs we have done. Omniscient, all-knowing, he counts not their sum. Thrown into a sea without bottom or shore, our sins, they are many, his mercy is more. Did you recognize those lines? Maybe not. Maybe that's not to your taste. Maybe you prefer your sung praise a little bit more traditional. If so, what about this? My sin, oh the bliss of this glorious thought, my sin, not in part but the whole, is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more. Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord,

O my soul. Two very, very different stanzas, I am sure you would agree, but stanzas that I think make the essential fundamental same point. And what is that? It's not actually just the point that you and I are sinners. That's not the point that those stanzas make in totality. No, it's the point that through Jesus, forgiveness, forgiveness of sins is available. That by grace, what God has done is he has devised a way for his people to be entirely cleansed, entirely forgiven for their sin. What was it that the apostle Paul preached, proclaimed in Pisidian Antioch? Do you remember? What was that jewel, the diamond, if you like, that's really at the very center of the gospel of God? You remember what Paul preached? He said this in Pisidian Antioch. He said, let it be known to you, therefore, that through this man, Jesus, forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Forgiveness of sins.

Well, this morning, it is that jewel, that diamond of forgiveness that I think really does glisten very brightly in this section of scripture that we've read together in Luke's gospel. So, how about this?

How about we pray ever so briefly, ask God for help, and then we turn into the text itself. Would you pray with me? Lord God, we rejoice in the center of the gospel, your grace, and this wonderful forgiveness that we know in Jesus Christ. And we have a prayer. We ask that you would draw us closer to yourself, that you would turn us in these moments, that we might face our Savior, Jesus Christ, that we might learn by the Holy Spirit more of our Savior and Lord. We ask that. We know that it must be of you, if it is to be worthwhile. And so, we ask, open these verses, these words to us, and we pray in Jesus' name and for his name's sake. Amen.

[3 : 5 7] So, the first thing that I think we need to look at and notice in this portion of scripture, first of all, is a persistence, a persistence. Now, perhaps, I don't know, but perhaps it is quite a long time since you have read or studied this particular portion of scripture, maybe especially in Luke's gospel or from Luke's gospel. But because of how well known this story is, I'm reasonably confident as I stand up here that you know the context, don't you? And you know the situation.

What's happening here in Luke's gospel? Where are we? Well, this here is very near the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. So, at this point in time, our Lord is very active, and he's active in and around the Sea of Galilee. He's focused there. We have that very clearly spelled out for us in Luke's gospel. What's he been doing? Okay, Jesus has been healing. We see that above this section, in the scripture, with the leper, and so forth. But primarily, what our Lord has been doing in his public ministry is preaching. And he's been preaching the good news of the kingdom of God.

I think you knew that. That's the context. That's the setting. The question, of course, that we have is, well, what happens here in this particular account? Well, what we have here reminds me of an event from my previous ministerial charge. So, not in Dundee, but before that, down in the dark depths of London. This reminds me of an event there. It was a Friday evening. You can come with me into it. So, it was a Friday evening a few years ago, a good number of years ago. And Catherine and myself, we were hosting the monthly 20s and 30s meeting at our house. So, it's a manse, and it's the northeast of London. I had invited a guest preacher to come along and to speak to the 20s and 30s.

But there was, this evening, a bit of a problem. And the problem was that I was running ridiculously late for this. I had been across London. I had been visiting another member of the congregation, an elderly lady. And as happened all of the time, the London transport system, the underground system had let me down. And I was running, oh, I was so late, so far behind schedule. And I will always remember the scene that awaited me when, you know, frazzled, I eventually arrive home. I always remember the scene. I'll use a Scottish term that hopefully is familiar to most of you. Our house that night was absolutely hoaching. It really was. It was incredibly busy. So, everyone that we had imagined might attend the 20s and 30s meeting, every one of them had attended. And they all seem to have brought a friend with them. And so, every chair, you can picture it, can't you? Like, every chair in the house is taken, every square inch of the floor is gone. So, this guest preacher that I'd invited along, he had to stand in a doorway between rooms in the hall, and he had to shout just because of the amount of pay. I remember being really frustrated, trying to push past everyone just to get into the home. Well, you can see it, can't you? You know, as you this morning, as God turns you into Luke chapter 5, isn't it kind of a similar situation that we've got before us just now, I'd ask you, where is our Lord here? You would say, wouldn't you, he is in a house.

He's in Capernaum. So, Mark, actually. Mark's gospel furnishes us with that little bit of information. He's in Capernaum. What is Jesus doing? He's seated there. He's teaching in this main room, but the place, as you look at it with your mind's eye, is absolutely stowed out with people.

[8 : 01] Isn't this place just hoaching? There's people everywhere. And who else is on the scene? That's right. Outside, we've got this group of men, don't we? They're frustrated. What have they done? They have brought their friend that they love. They've brought him on a stretcher, this paralyzed man.

They've brought him to this house. What's the problem? Though they have tried, and tried, and tried. They cannot get this man to Jesus. They can't get him to bring him before the Lord. Now, what's the elephant in the room? I suppose the elephant in the room is that you know the story, don't you? And you know exactly what happens next. But I do think that there's probably at least a couple of aspects of the men's behavior that you and I should consider just now.

A couple of aspects about how these men behave. Number one, I think we should consider their ingenuity or their creativity, don't you? Because have you, at some point in your Christian life, have you ever come across a drawing of a Palestinian house in the ancient world? Have you ever seen that sort of thing? But you know, it's the sort of thing you find in a kid's Bible, isn't it? Or an illustrated Bible. Even if you have never seen a picture, you can imagine that a house in Israel in the first century world is a pretty simple affair, can't you? What is it? It's actually quite a small house. It's got one door. And what else do you see as you look at it? You see that there are, there always were external stairs leading up to a roof. And what do we know? Because of the climate, it wasn't like Aberdeen is this morning. But because of the climate, they could use that roof almost like a second story, couldn't they? I mean, think about the apostle Peter. You know where I'm going, don't you? You remember the vision that Peter had, the animals, the sheep? Where was he?

He's up on the roof. This was used. And what happens here? You can almost see it, can't you, with these men? They come up with a plan. They can't get in through the main door. So one of them shouts to the others, I got it. I know what we'll do. Let's break into this house. But let's break in from above. What is it? It's an unorthodox approach, isn't it? But isn't there creativity here?

Isn't there ingenuity? It's the first aspect. The second aspect for you to consider surely is the sheer effort that they put in. You know what it's like if you've sat through preaching enough in your life. You know, there's the sort of awkward bits where some preachers, they have that sort of moment of confession and they start pouring out their failings and their sins sometimes in sermons.

[11 : 02] Don't worry, I won't go too far. But it's certainly true here that I think in this story, there was a mistake that I've been making for a long, long time. And I wonder maybe some of you making the same mistake or have made it. I thought with these men now up on the roof, I thought it was just no big deal for them to be able to break through that roof.

I wonder if you ever thought about that. Maybe as a kid even, you thought like that. You know, I thought it was just move a few twigs. You know, move a little bit of thatch, move a little bit of mud and you're away. There was no big deal for these men. But can I ask you to look at verse 19 to see what you are told here? If you look at verse 19, what do they have to do? Now the other, the synoptics, the other gospels don't draw your attention to it like Luke does. But Luke wants you to see, they had to, what does it say? They had to break through the tiles to do this. Like, do you see what that tells us? I think everyone gets the idea, don't you? This roof is a sturdy affair. This is a solid affair, isn't it? This took work, graft, effort. And then, wait a second, can I ask you to recall what exactly they're trying to do? They're not just trying to make this little pinprick in this roof or they are a little hole. They have to create here an expanse of the size that they're able to lower in a full-size stretcher, like six foot, seven foot hole to lower this thing down. What do you see when you look at this story if it's not blood, sweat, and tears?

Now, I think personally, this is such an evocative scene, isn't it? Don't we love this story? There's a reason we go very quickly to tell our children in Sunday school this story. Isn't it wonderful?

Evocative? But why? This morning at Bon Accord, what are we to learn from this? I think I agree with an American minister, Phil Riken. He says this. I wonder if you agree with this. It's surely worth your thought. He says, what we have in this story, what we have here is a picture for us for Christian evangelism. As we think about these men on this roof, what we have is a picture for us at Bon Accord this morning, a picture for your life and my life, and a picture for Christian evangelism.

I want to follow that up with a question for you. Christian friend, and it is a question for the Christians. Do you have people in your life just now that you really care for and love, people who do not yet know the Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior? Do you have people, can you picture those people, people you know and love who do not yet know Jesus? The answer, if you were to shout it out to me, would be, Andy, of course I do. Of course I have multiple people like that, right?

[14:19] And isn't it the case that you and I, we face so many obstacles as we seek to bring those people on stretchers to the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ? Don't we face obstacles? I think often the obstacles that are there because of your sin and my sin, right? Obstacles just to set forth before them that just the simple facts of the gospel. And we face obstacles, don't we, in just trying to invite them to church? And we face obstacles, I think if we're honest, we face obstacles even to consistently praying for these people. And don't you see it here in these men? Are we not given an illustration for us of what godly persistence looks like? Can I say that again? In these men on the roof, you and I are given for evangelism an illustration of godly persistence and what it might look like. And perhaps this morning we have to ask ourselves, wait, are there people in our lives, your life, my life, that we are all too readily leaving outside the house. Do you see what I mean? Yeah, okay, these people that perhaps we've tried somewhat superficially, you know, to bring in a stretcher to Jesus, but then what's happened, we face some sort of obstacle and we've perhaps been all too quick just to leave them, leave them be, put them down, leave them alone. Well, I know, you know, we have to be very careful about how and when we speak to people about the Lord Jesus Christ, but are we not from this story being encouraged today to maybe follow after these men? Are there stretchers that we need to go back to? Are there people that you need to go back to? Can we not? Can we not be creative like these men in how we present the gospel to these folk? Must we not again embrace the efforts, the sheer effort that is sometimes involved in Christian witness? But there are, aren't there some beautiful words here in verse 19? I wonder if you see them in in verse 19. What do these guys get to do? What do they not stop until they've done? Right at the end of verse 19, do you see it? They don't stop until their friend is right in front of Jesus, right there in his shadow. Isn't that what you want? Isn't that what I want for our unbelieving friends and family?

Perhaps from here, what we need to do is go and seek to break through the tiles. First thing we see is a persistence, don't we? It's a persistence here, godly persistence.

Second of all, I want you to consider with me a provision, a provision. Until this point in this story here, we've been considering this account, I think, from the top down. Where have we been? We've kind of been up on that roof, haven't we, with those men working away? I think, though, it'd be very helpful for us to also consider this event and to consider what it would have been like from actually within the house itself. So I'm going to ask you to try and imagine what that would have been like. Can you? With your mind's eye, what would it have been like from within the house? So what do you have? You've got a room, and it is absolutely packed with people, don't you? In the middle of this room, we have our Lord, and he's seated most likely as he has been throughout Luke's gospel, and he's teaching. He's seated, and he's teaching, and suddenly, there is this scraping sound, isn't there? And maybe a little bit of dust falls from above, and then out of nowhere, a shaft of light falls into this what is otherwise a darkened room, and you and I, we look up from this room, and what do we see above us? But some really sweaty faces, I think, clobbering away, clawing away at the ceiling above us. Now, I could be wrong about this, of course, but I think as this stretcher is lowered into the room, I could be wrong, it's speculation, but I imagine that everybody in that room is holding their breath. Don't you think so? You see why? They're all wondering, what's Jesus going to do? As this stretcher comes down, is Jesus going to rebuke these men for interrupting his teaching? Is he going to rebuke them for ruining this house? But if you look at it, what you notice is that the Lord Jesus does something much more shocking and much more surprising. Can I ask you as a congregation to look at it and see it in verse 20? Verse 20, how does Jesus respond? Do you notice?

Everyone's holding their breath, and on the basis, he sees their faith. Can I ask you, whose faith? Whose faith? So it's the men on the roof, right? But it's also, surely, it's the man on the stretcher.

He sees their faith, and then what does he see? Jesus declares this man's sin, forgiven, forgiven. Now, what did I just say a second ago? I said that that would have been so shocking. It would have been surprising. Can you see? Can everybody see why that would have been shocking? Like, for everybody in that room, everyone that's packed in there, for everybody, this man's needs would have been apparently very obvious indeed. Like, what did this paralyzed man need from Jesus? Everyone's looking thinking, thinking, this man needs to be able to walk again. So why does Jesus do this? Why does he say this? Well, friends, what Jesus is doing here, he is revealing this man's greatest need, and I will adapt that. What Jesus is doing in this portion of Scripture that God has brought you to this morning, what Jesus is doing in this morning. What Jesus is doing in that moment is revealing to you mankind's greatest need. Now, I mean this with no disrespect, but in a sense, I don't care if you have been at

[21 : 12] Bon Accord for 30 years or for 39 minutes. I would humbly ask you to listen to this.

What the Bible makes abundantly clear is that your greatest problem is the problem of your sin.

Your greatest problem, no matter what you think it might be in your life just now, your greatest problem is the problem of your sin. Now, what on earth do you mean by that? Well, if you look out there to the world, then certainly it's the case that you can see something of the problem of sin. I doubt that there's anybody in this hall this morning who would argue that our world is evidently broken, regardless of your political affiliations or leanings. You look at the world and you see it's broken. Wars are being waged. People are being killed. There's inequality socially, financially. There's relationships that are breaking down. So, yes, if you look out there, you see the problem of sin. But this morning, if you look with some honesty here to your own heart, surely you recognize the problem of sin. Listen, your sin is your lack of conforming to the standard that your Creator has set for you. Now, it is the reality, and it is whether you've been a Christian for a long time or not. Listen, it is the reality that every single one of us has infinitely offended our Creator by the way that we are, by the way that we rebel against Him. So, your thought patterns that are wicked, your activity, your habits that are wicked, the words that you wish sometimes could have taken back. By all of this, you and I have infinitely offended the pristine holiness of our God. And we have to ask, well, where does that, that's real, that's true, where does that lead?

Do you know where it leads? Our sin leads to realities and words that make us recoil in seats in church sometimes. Our sin, it leads to realities like condemnation and light judgment and ultimately, sin leads to the only bad four-letter word that I'm allowed to use from a free church pulpit.

Because our sin really does lead to hell. Now, it really does lead to the, now here, the just, right, right, fair, eternal outpouring of God the Father's wrath on our wickedness and rebellion.

[24 : 17] It really does. That's, that's, that's true. It's real. And so, if you're a Christian in this place this morning, and you focus on that anew, do you see why Luke chapter 5 is just so special?

Because, Christian friend, what are you being reminded about this morning at God's word? Like, okay, you're reminded of the character of God, he's quick to forgive, he's, you know, but what are you really reminded of? As you hear Jesus declare, make the statement over this man on the mat, you this morning are reminded he's done that for you. You're reminded of what Christ has done, but you're reminded of what God has said of you. And maybe this morning you just need to hear that again, do you? No matter how long you've been a Christian, God has said, your sins, man, woman, your sins, they have in Christ, they have been forgiven. You, you sit there forgiven. So, you, like this man here, you Christian friend, you've entered into a new state of being when you came to Jesus Christ. It's a beautiful thought. So, you have entered this state of forgiveness. That's how you live. That's how you are. And it's a state of forgiveness from which you can never, ever be removed. You are, and always will be, forgiven for sins from the past, the sins you're struggling with now, your future sins, all of it. And, and, and what's happened with you, what's happened with me is just the same as this story. Whether we recognize it or not, that there's people in your life in the past, Christian friend, and do you know what they've done? They've brought you on a stretcher to the feet of Jesus. Okay, can you pinpoint them maybe in your own story? We don't talk about that enough, do we, in the life of the church, our testimony? Who's been active? Who did, who did that for you? If you'll allow me to be personal just for a second, in my own life, it's my mum and my dad. Do you know what they did?

They broke through the tiles. That's what they did. Just by praying for their son, being patient with their son, reminding me the gospel. When I needed it, they showed me Jesus again. Who was it for you?

Right? And, and aren't we ever so grateful to, to those people, aren't we? But who is it that deserves, who is it alone that deserves all the praise? We know the answer. All praise must be heaped on Jesus Christ and he alone for what has he done, if you think about the story. Isn't it something to consider that for you, like here, for you, Jesus of Nazareth was carried by men. Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, in death, having borne all the punishment that you deserve, your sins deserve.

What else is true of Jesus? Think of the story. You were Lord like here. Your Lord was Lord for you. He was not Lord from a, from a ceiling into a room, was he? But he, on that cross for you, Jesus Christ spiritually was Lord into that hell, that hell that you deserve and I deserve. Jesus on that cross facing all of that just and fair, the righteous eternal punishment at your sins. And then if you consider the story of what else is true, yes, Jesus Christ has walked again.

[28 : 07] Isn't it true? Not out of a house carrying a mat, carrying a stretcher. No, Jesus Christ has walked forth from a tomb, victorious, able even this morning to bestow forgiveness on any who will turn to him in repentance and faith. Isn't this jewel? Isn't this diamond of forgiveness? Isn't it worth us taking out and inspecting and admiring more often? What is it that Christ says to you, Christian friend, in the gospel? What does he remind you of? Listen to Isaiah 43. In the gospel, Christ says to you this morning, I, even I am the one who has wiped out your transgressions. Or if you want it from Luke chapter 5, he says to you, man, woman, as awful as it's been, as rebellious as you have been, he says, man, woman, your sins, they are forgiven you. We see here a provision. Thirdly, most briefly, lastly, we also see a proof. So we see a persistence, we see a provision, and then thirdly, lastly, a proof.

Although I have passed over this until now, I do think it is worth us noting who exactly it was that makes up this crowd that are packed into the room in Capernaum and obviously are packed outside the house. Although it's not mentioned in any of the other gospel accounts, we don't get information from Matthew or Mark. Luke wants you to know who's in the crowd. And Luke makes mention of two groups of people. You can see it at the start there. Who's in the group? As you look at this group packed in there, first of all, you've got the Pharisees. I'm sure we all know who they were, don't we? The Pharisees, they were a lay religious group, a lay religious group who had, because they were so concerned with adherents to the Torah. They had built up, hadn't they, this big network of extra rules and extra laws. We know about the Pharisees. That's the first group. Who else is there? We've got the teachers of the law. Later on, they're actually referred to as the scribes. Do you know that these were really the Pharisees' lawyers? So these guys were the ones who were able to rule on whether these Pharisees' extra laws and extra rules had been kept. So you with me? Isn't that help us to understand, look at the crowd? Well, now when we appreciate who's in the crowd,

I think the reaction to Jesus' declaration about sin is understandable. Because what do we know? What do you know about the Old Testament? You know that in the Old Testament, it was only God alone who had the authority to forgive sin. So I'm going to test the students here, because we spoke about this at your weekend away last year. And you've got to, if you were there, you've got to pretend that you remember what we talked about. We talked about Jesus as prophet, priest, and king, didn't we? Yes. Prophet. So we know what an Old Testament prophet did. What did an Old Testament prophet do? What could they do? An Old Testament prophet could speak with God's word and authority, couldn't they? An Old Testament prophet could heal sometimes with God's power, but what could they not do? Where was the line? They could not remit sin. In the Old Testament, it was Yahweh, it was the

Lord alone who had the authority to cleanse and to forgive sins. So you can see it here, can't you? What did you do? In the room, they're all looking at Jesus thinking, what did he say? Forgiveness of sins.

There is here a very, it's silent, but it's a very real rejection of Jesus. It's actually the first rejection of Jesus we have in Luke's gospel. These Pharisees, they're scribes, they're looking at Jesus and thinking this claim is entirely illegitimate. Now what does Jesus do? Jesus responds to this with a question, but here's what I would love from you. I would love you to see if you can work out why Jesus asks this question. So we're drawing it to a close with this. If you look at verse 23, verse 23, what does Jesus ask and why? You get the setting. He's declared forgiveness. They hate it. And so Jesus turns to them and asks this, doesn't he? Well, okay, which is easier to say, Jesus asks, which is easier to say your sins are forgiven or to say rise and walk? Does everyone in the room see what Jesus is doing?

[33 : 19] I mean, you can see that in a sense, if you'll allow me this, in a sense, it is easier to say your sin is forgiven than it is to say rise up and walk, isn't it? It's easier to say that because you do not have to prove the forgiveness in the moment. Do you see what Jesus is doing? Jesus here by grace and mercy is setting things up that he might provide proof that he has the authority that he claims.

He is setting everything up in a row beautifully to provide proof that that declaration about sin and forgiveness is indeed the case with Jesus of Nazareth. And what is the proof? Isn't it spectacular?

When you come to it anew, what Jesus does is he restores this man's ability to walk in order that everyone in the room might be able to see and know that he is true. This is his identity. He has that authority. Suddenly, strength returns to this man's limbs and he climbs up out of his stretcher, his mat, all this strength. And this man who entered the room through the roof is enabled to leave the room by the front door. Isn't it marvelous? Now, this morning, of course, by the nature of this text, I have spoken in the main to you, if you are a Christian, I've spoken to the people of God Bon Accord. I want to close by addressing you this morning, if perhaps you are yet to have your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And all I would ask is this, do you feel the challenge of this text in your own life? Do you see what the text is challenging you to do? This text here is prompting you to decide for yourself who Jesus is. So this text is taking you into this room and what have you seen and heard?

You've heard Jesus make a staggering claim of authority that he can forgive sin. You have seen him provide proof of this. The text hands it over to you and says, and what do you say? Do you believe this? Do you believe Jesus is who he claims to be? So I hand it to you just now. What do you say?

That famous trilemma of C.S. Lewis does spring to mind, doesn't it? You know it, don't you? C.S. Lewis says that Jesus is either mad, he's bad, or he's God, and you might like that.

[36 : 02] But I prefer the old Scottish verse. Rabbi Duncan once said, Jesus is either deluded, self-deceived, or Jesus is indeed divine. What do you say? What do you say this morning?

And ask for the people of God. I know what we do. We join the crowd, don't we, at the end of the section? Don't we join the crowd in glorifying and praising God for what do we believe? We believe that Jesus is who he claims to be, don't we? We believe that he is the Son of God. We believe that he is the Son of Man. And we believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the only one who has authority to offer a free, free and full forgiveness for our sin. I think we'll end where we began, will we? And I wonder, can you, in your heart before God, can you see this of yourself? Listen, my sin. Oh, the bliss of this glorious thought. My sin, not in part, but the whole, is nailed to the cross. And I bear it no more. Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord. Oh, my soul.

Friends, let's bow our heads. Now let's pray. When we, O Lord, consider our lives, we are bowled over in you at your grace to us. There is nothing inherently good or worthy in us at all. We are a people wracked with sin. We are a people rebellious and self-centered. And yet you have shown us such mercy. We thank you that you have done all in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, that you are able to bestow full and free forgiveness on your people. And so this morning, we look to you and we praise you for Jesus Christ. We pray in his name. Amen.