



Luke 5:17-26
Not Famous, But Known
“Faith That Carries”

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This morning we’re looking at one of the most famous and vivid events from Jesus’ ministry. It’s a story that shows what can happen when ordinary people step out in faith toward Jesus — people who aren’t famous, but who are known to Him. That’s what this series, “Not Famous, But Known” is all about. I mentioned last week I’d have a Starbucks gift card for anyone who can tell me, without using the internet (and who does not live in my house), where I got the sermon series title from. Any guesses?

...I figured it would be a long shot, but you never know. It’s the slogan of a chain of bagel shops in New York City, called “Pop-up Bagels”. When we were there for Hailey’s college graduation this past spring, we went to Pop-up Bagels for lunch one day, and Gwen turned to me and said, “That slogan would be a great title for a sermon series.” I couldn’t agree more. And that meant that whole trip to NYC became a business expense for sermon research, so thank you for that! Just kidding! 😂 So, we are looking at a few of Jesus’ encounters with people who are far from famous—but known by him.

This morning we’re in one of the more memorable events in Jesus’ ministry. So, open your Bibles, or Bible App, or follow along on the screen, as we dive into God’s Word for you and me this morning, **Luke 5:17–26**, ...

Like I said, it’s a very vivid event. Perhaps you can picture yourself there surrounded by a crowd listening to Jesus teach, when suddenly bits of mud and straw and sticks start falling from the ceiling. A hole opens up above, sunlight shines in – well...that part is hard to imagine maybe – rain starts coming through...and a man is lowered down on a mat.

Now, we need to remember that their homes had nearly flat roofs with wood beams, then smaller sticks or branches crossing over those, and then covered by a mud-and-grass mixture that could easily be replaced. Luke uses a word that can be translated “tiles” but it’s not like porcelain. The word he uses can simply mean “baked clay” or in this instance, simply refer to the clay layer of

the roof. So, there would be several layers to it all told, and it was quite sturdy, with a ladder or stairway to access it. In fact, roofs served like an outdoor patio, or a place to dry out grain or fruit. In Acts 10:9, we are told of Peter going up on the roof of a home to pray.

So, while that construction allowed for this kind of thing, it's not every day that someone's house turned into a retractable roof stadium like T-mobile Park — or gets a skylight spontaneously installed! But that's what happens, because they couldn't get through the crowd. The place is packed — people spilling out the door — and there's simply no normal way to reach Jesus.

Now, before we look at the man or his friends, I want to spend some time on the issue of forgiveness — and the reaction of those who thought Jesus was blaspheming. **In their minds, forgiving sins was something God alone could do.** It happened in the temple, through animal sacrifice, where God forgave sin. Now, of course, people could and can forgive one another on a personal level — if I steal candy this week from one of my kids' stash (not that I would do that!) and then confess my sin, my child can forgive me. That's one level of forgiveness — the horizontal one between humans.

But sin also always has a *vertical* dimension — against God Himself. That's the level of forgiveness Jesus is addressing here. This paralyzed man hasn't sinned against Jesus personally. He's not coming to seek forgiveness for anything. But Jesus looks at him and says, "Your sins are forgiven." You can imagine the guy just being incredulous at Jesus, "No no no...Jesus: Did you miss the part of me being lowered down through the roof on a mat? I can't walk." "I did see that. You landed right in front of me. Hard to miss it. But—you need forgiveness." "Maybe I do...or my friends do because they put that hole in the roof...but what *I* really need is to walk." "No: *what you really need* is deeper than that. You need forgiveness." You can just imagine this kind of conversation possibly happening. So, when Jesus says, "Your sins are forgiven," it's a breathtaking moment.

And by speaking those words of forgiveness, Jesus equates Himself with God — not subtly, but loudly. It's a claim to divinity, because it's this vertical forgiveness that Jesus is speaking of and everyone there knows it.

That's why the religious leaders start thinking to themselves that Jesus is being blasphemous. They recognize that Jesus is not forgiving the guy in the *horizontal* sense of forgiveness that we all do; they recognize that Jesus is forgiving in the *vertical* sense that only God can do. And that, to them, was blasphemous because it means Jesus is equating himself with God.

So, if you struggle to believe that Jesus actually made the divinity claim, like if you think that's a made-up thing by Christians, then look at the response of people who opposed him in the Gospels, such as we see here. The religious leaders, who were opposed to Jesus, *they* heard Jesus saying crystal clear that he is God in the flesh. Jesus' divinity is not some doctrine manufactured by Christians decades or centuries later. People in Jesus' day, including his opponents, understood him to be making this claim of divinity. It's *why* they were opposed to him all the way to crucifixion.

Now, as for the guy on the mat, when Jesus says, "Your sins are forgiven," Jesus is not being dismissive of the guy's paralysis. Rather, Jesus is going straight to the heart. **The man's deepest problem seemed physical, but really, it was spiritual.** We are the same. We tend to see only the surface — the habit, the addiction, the exhaustion, the financial strain. But Jesus sees the spiritual roots and the spiritual needs beneath the physical. He sees the deeper problem, and he knows the truest and deepest healing every one of us needs is forgiveness of our sin so we would be reconciled with God for eternity.

So, when the religious leaders question his authority to forgive, Jesus responds by healing the man's paralysis. **He's demonstrating that he has the power to forgive, and his words are not hollow.** He means what he says. At Jesus' command the man gets up, takes his mat, and walks out. These are divinely spoken words that carry the power in them for the man to do this. In his words, Jesus is giving the man the strength to do this. So, the man stands, takes up his mat, and then leaves, with the crowd probably parting like the Red Sea to let him out the door.

This moment points ahead to Jesus' resurrection, where he provides the ultimate proof of his authority to forgive sins. Jesus' crucifixion on the cross

and victory over death is God’s declaration for *us* to see, that forgiveness is real and complete — for this man, for us, and for all who trust Jesus.

Now, let’s look at verse 20, where: **Luke tells us that Jesus “*saw their faith*” (verse 20).** That’s a surprising phrase, because faith is invisible – it’s in a person’s heart and mind. Yet Luke says Jesus *saw* their faith. Well, what he saw was their actions. (Like the NT book of James, which is all about putting faith in action.) Their faith was visible in what they did. The friends believed Jesus could help, and their belief showed up in their determination. They refused to let obstacles stop them. They carried their friend and found a way to bring him before Jesus. That’s faith that carries.

That’s also the kind of faith the Church is called to embody. It’s faith that doesn’t just believe *for ourselves*, but believes *on behalf of others* — interceding in prayer, serving in hospitality, and carrying them to the very feet of Jesus.

Then there’s the paralyzed man himself. He couldn’t come on his own. Maybe his friends urged him to go, or maybe he asked them to take him — Luke doesn’t say. **But we do know he trusted his friends enough to be carried up onto the roof and lowered through a hole!**

Imagine lying there on a cot, hearing your buddies say, “Hey, we can’t get in the front door. Too many people. So, here’s what we’re gonna do: We’ll take you up on the roof, make a hole in it and lower you down!” That man had to trust his buddies, as well as the crowd below, and trust Jesus waiting in the room. That’s what faith does — it entrusts itself fully to the hands of God and also his people.

And when Jesus told him, “Stand up and walk,” he did it. That, too, was faith that is seen. It takes faith to come to Jesus, and just as much faith to obey Jesus once He speaks. **The fruit of this guy’s faith is his obedience.** It’s important to notice the order in the Christian faith. Obedience is a fruit of faith, not a prerequisite. And that faith rests on Jesus and what he’s done and what he says.

Finally, let's notice the crowd. The paralyzed man had friends who were willing to carry him — but the crowd made it difficult for him to get to Jesus. It's tragic when people who are already near Jesus block the way for those who really want to get close to him. The church ceases to be the church when it becomes a club that forgets the outsiders desiring to join in.

Jesus came to open the way for *all* — not just for those who already fit in. Anyone can know Jesus as Lord and Savior. But when the church obscures Jesus instead of revealing Him, we've lost our purpose. **So, the call for us is clear: be like the friends. Be like the man.** Have a faith that carries others to Jesus, that trusts others to help bring us to Jesus — and let our faith be *seen* by the way we love, serve, and make room.

If Jesus were standing here in front of us today, would he “see our faith”? Would he see your faith? We may have our questions about Jesus and we may not feel like Biblical scholars...but we know Jesus well enough and have read our Bibles enough that we're in a position to be more like the friends. **We can let our faith be seen by helping others come to Jesus: praying for them, serving them, making a little room in our lives for them, and simply living our faith around them.** Remember, someone did that for you initially — whether a parent, a friend, a spouse...someone helped bring you to Jesus and this place of faith.

And every one of us knows someone like that paralyzed man and like we once were — someone who can't quite come to Jesus on their own. Maybe it's a friend who's stuck in guilt or doubt, or a family member weighed down by sin or sorrow, a neighbor who believes that stuff, experiences, and money is all that really matters, or a “good” guy or good gal who believes that if God does exist, they're good enough on their own. I guarantee that you know people who fit these descriptions, and whether they realize it yet or not: they need people who will carry them to Jesus in prayer, in friendship, in invitation. That's what “Faith That Carries” looks like. It's not about being famous, impressive, or powerful. It's about being known by Jesus — and helping others know him through a visible faith.

And: It all comes back to Jesus' words: "*Your sins are forgiven.*" They're not just for the man on the mat. They're for you, me, and others such as our neighbors. Some people this morning need to hear that message and receive it: that God forgives you of your sin through Jesus. He meets your deepest need, at this foundational, spiritual level. We're not famous, but we're known by him, and he forgives us. And then as forgiven people, let's together be ones who carry others to Jesus through our faith that is seen and our love that is known, so that they can see and receive the forgiveness of a Savior who knows them by name. Let's pray...Amen.