

## Sanctuary Talk

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Naomi Pendle

### 'Be forgiven'

*Luke 5:17-25* Jesus forgives and heals the paralysed man

We're going to focus on the Luke passage today, following in this series about thinking about coming to Jesus and bringing people to Jesus, you remember Tom's talk last week that talked about us being fishers of men, we've heard the call about bringing people to Alpha again and again. And so it's in the Luke passage that we're focusing on. But I think the Isaiah passage actually rings very true with what I'm going to say. Because actually, what I want to say is to remind us who God is and who Jesus is. So in a way, I have three big questions to have in our minds as we just think through this passage this morning. The first one is who has carried us to Jesus? I hope this is a service that can just give us a moment to remember, and to be thankful for, whoever those people are that have carried us to Jesus. And also, by the end, I hope we should be asking, Who should we be carrying to Jesus? Who are our friends at the moment, whether they know Jesus or not, who need that carrying. But actually, what I'm going to focus on today is the question of who Jesus is, if we have been carried to him, and if we're meant to carry people to him, whether that's through Alpha, through friendship, through other things. We don't take them there just because we are told to take people there. We take them there because we know who Jesus is, because he is worth us carry people to. And actually a lot of this passage, a passage, which is a very well known Sunday school type passage, actually has some very, very radical things to say about who Jesus is. So really, today, what I'm going to talk through is this idea of crazy friendship, the crazy friendship of those friends that carried the paralyzed man to Jesus. But then also the crazy power that we see in this passage about who Jesus is. So first of all, I'm talking about crazy friendship of these friends, then our talk about the crazy power of Jesus that we see through this passage, maybe less obviously, but it's definitely there. And then third of all, are talking about the crazy love of Jesus.

So first of all, the crazy friendship. So we are taken into this story. And through this crowded room. People have already heard about Jesus, he's started to heal people. He's started to teach he stood up in the synagogue and read from passages in Isaiah. People are starting to hear the news of Jesus, but they don't really know who he is, but they want to find out. People want to come, they want to be healed. But also the Pharisees and the teachers want to have a glimpse of who this person might be. Is he a threat to their authority? Is he supportive of their authority? How is he going to sit in

relation to the kind of power in the area? And so he has come to this house is sitting in a room, you know, the kind of lounge equivalent and people have crowded in and the most important people of the day are sitting at the front. So the Pharisees of the teachers of the law, because they want to know, and they have the best seats, just like when you go to the theatre, the people with the most money, have the best seats and you know, in that kind of lounge snuggled in, the most important people were right in front of Jesus. And then these friends come along with the man who is paralyzed. And we don't know that much about that friendship. The Bible doesn't tell us how did they know this paralyzed man? Was he a friend from childhood? Was he a friend that they got to know more recently? What has he done for them? What have they done to him? But what we do know is that it was an incredibly strong friendship, because in those moments, they are willing to take some big risks for their friend. One, obviously, as we know, they climb up onto the roof, they take the roof apart, and that's definitely property damage. You're not quite sure if you're going to hurt anyone. As you take the roof apart. You've got a crowded room beneath you, as you try and disassemble the roof. They are willing to carry him up to the roof which must have been incredibly heavy, as you see this kind of crazy physical act of taking apart the roof. But also it's a very subservient act to the kind of norms and authority of the day. Not just because it wasn't normal to take apart a roof, but also because they had been kept out. Whoever they were, these friends and this paralyzed man, they were not to be at the front of the crowd. And here you see these four friends, pushing this paralyzed man to the front. They're saying, actually, whatever the norms of the day say, we don't mind He is our friend. And this is we are dedicated to him. And in this crazy act of friendship, they push him to the front, and they push him into Jesus's presence. And I hope you can think of times when people have pushed you into Jesus' presence, whether that was long, long ago, when you were a child, or more recently, I hope it's happened many times for you. Maybe they were small acts. I don't imagine if any of you were lowered through a roof. But hopefully, you know those times. So they were big sacrifices or small sacrifices. There have been big moments in my life. And actually, it's been friends, not strangers, friends who often made the difference. Someone who Laura Bayliss when I was 17, I was about to go off to university and she wrote. She went to new wine, this Christian festival, she wrote my name on a list of people going to university the next September. And because of that, the church at the university contacted me and it's through that connection that I've really regave my life to Christ in those precarious weeks of Freshers week. But it was just one act of a friend in a kind of passing moment. But because I was on her heart, she did that. Another one is Joe Skinner. When I had my son, I was finding it hard. He couldn't feed very well. And it was all a very turbulent time anyway, I don't

remember her coming really, really late at night, she was still working, she wasn't my midwife. She didn't need to be with me at all. But she lived down the road for me, she was in my home group, but she came late at night to teach Jonathan how to feed. And it was good that he could feed and that was really important, but also that active kind of witness of crazy friendship. And that moment, when I needed God to affirm that he was there was really powerful.

I really hope when we have those friends around us to carry us when we need them. But sometimes the wrong moments of loneliness. And just as I was kind of preparing this, I wanted to say that that's true that sometimes when we talk about friendship and people carrying us, we can have moments when we feel very uncared when we feel like we've been left alone. And I'd like to say sorry, for that shouldn't happen, we are a family, this is your family, and sometimes you'll feel really like is your family and sometimes you'll feel that you'll be left alone and somehow shut out. But I would just like to pray and encourage you to say to people when you need carrying that you do need carrying, but sometimes we as people get it wrong, and we miss the people around us that need carrying. And I just really pray that you have the strength to say to someone right now I need you to carry me to Jesus.

So as we know, Jesus responds to this crazy act of friendship, and he forgives and then heals. So the craziness is not without results. And without good results, the results that these friends would have loved. And therefore their friend is forgiven. And he's healed and he walks out of the room. And that's amazing, that this kind of crazy acts of friendship will be responded to. But what I want to focus on a little bit more is not the healing. But the thing that really upset the religious leaders in the room. Because this is where we really see Jesus at play in this kind of show of power. And so what really upset the religious leader leaders, it wasn't the healing, the healing comes later. It was the fact that Jesus had said that you are 'forgiven'. And saying 'you are forgiven' was the shocking, crackling claim that was really in those few words upturning and making it clear to the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, that Jesus was coming to do something much bigger.

What do we know about Jesus from this point? The Pharisees in the room had come to find out more of who he was claiming to be. The people were trying to work out who this Jesus was. And already if we go through Luke, so there's two readings taken from Luke, we know quite a bit we know he had this amazing birth with stars in the sky and angels singing and wise man traveling from far away. We're told already by Luke that he has this amazing genealogy that takes him back to the kings of the

past the leaders of the past, the figures of the Old Testament, and eventually back to Adam, we know that he has called His disciples to be fishers of men. We know He has started healing people. But many of these things point to him being something more than just a good teacher or just a healer. But it's in this moment when he's talks about forgiveness that we really see a clearer session of Jesus saying, I am God and I am going to be more than the temple that you can offer.

So why is forgiveness so offensive? Why is it that when the leaders hear him say, I forgive you do they get offended? In many ways, forgiveness seems like a very benign and gentle thing to say. It feels a word that we associate with kindness, and being gentle to people, things that would encourage our children to do when someone does something wrong to them would encourage them to forgive. How can that anger the politicians of the day? And that's because forgiveness is incredibly hard. And it's unclear who has the right to forgive. So many of you might know, I spend a lot of time working in South Sudan. This is a picture of a protection of civilian sites. About 200,000 people in South Sudan live on these protection of civilians sites to keep them safe from the warring parties in the war. But there has been quite a lot of conversation in South Sudan recently about forgiveness. So one example I mentioned is from the 90s. In 1991, there was a large scale offensive by a group of armed youth, and they attacked a village in Boer an area called Boer. And they massacred vast numbers of people, women, children, 10s of 1000s of people were killed, it prompted a famine in which many people died and other people who survived fled. That was in 1991. Recently, a political leader from that area, responded to a political leader who had been part of that offensive. And the political leader who had been part of the offensive said, I want your forgiveness, I want you to forgive. I want to be forgiven for what we did back in 1991. And the political leader from Boer from the community that had been attacked, said, Yes, I forgive you. We forgive you as a community of Boer. But it was very, very controversial, because many people from Boer said, I'm not sure she had the right to accept the forgiveness. We are still hurting, it was our children who were killed. She is a political leader, why is it her that has the power to accept forgiveness. And it's something we would want to encourage. But still, if your children have been lost, and your lives and your home and your land has been lost, it's not an easy thing to hear another person saying. And that brings us to back to why the Pharisees were so angry. The Pharisees were angry because they knew that the person wronged could be involved in forgiveness. But the only other person who really could grant forgiveness was God himself. The Bible makes it very, very clear again, and again, in the Old Testament, that forgiveness comes from God alone. He alone can forgive. And that's because

when we hurt others, we hurt God, we rupture our relationship with Him. That is the most painful thing, the relationships he longed to have, the family he longed to build are ruptured, and that grieves him, but he has the power to forgive. So when Jesus was in that room, saying, I forgive you, he was saying that he was given that authority by God or that He was God. And that pushed against the order of the day.

So the order of the day, God had already thought about forgiveness, he already knew that we would fall short, he already knew that we would get things wrong, and that people would need a way to seek forgiveness to come back to him, he wanted his children to have a way back. And so at that time, the way to seek forgiveness was to go to the temple. And forgiveness was through the priest. And these kinds of teachers of the law that was sitting there were part of that system. It was through the temple and through the priest and through the sacrifice. And this comes from the Old Testament, and it's clearly laid out, but there's no easy thing. You have much of the Book of Leviticus telling us again and again, how you can seek forgiveness, how you can find atonement, how even when things are wrong, you can come back to God and come to that place of forgiveness. There was no easy thing the sacrifice had to be right. It had to be in the temple and it had to be condoned by the priests. And so when Jesus is in that room, saying that he can forgive, he is saying that he is like a priest. He is challenging the order of the priesthood of the temple. And he is also saying, Look, you don't have to go to the temple, I'm in a room that's crowded, probably really uncomfortable, and the roof has just fallen down. But even in this place, this very imperfect place, forgiveness can be received. And so Jesus is overturning these things and making a massive claim to power against the power of the day. And this isn't that he totally rejected the temple. In the healing story before he asked the person who was healed to go to the temple. But he is a better realisation of the temple, a less corrupt, a less determined by human frailty, opportunity to seek forgiveness. But again, in this passage we'll see another thing that hints at the power of God. So Jesus, throughout the New Testament, in all of the Gospels, the main name he uses of himself is 'The Son of Man'. We might think of the word Messiah, that's not wrong. We might think of the word Saviour, obviously, his name was Jesus, but the Son of Man is the word he keeps repeatedly using about himself. And this speaks of humility. If He is a son of man, he is frail, and he can die. But it also it conjures great ideas of power, Tony is briefly going to read to us this passage from Daniel 7, which is the first kind of reference to the Son of Man.

'In my vision that night I looked, and there before me was one like the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven. He approached the ancient days and was led into

his presence. He was given authority, glory, and sovereign power. All nations and peoples of every language worship him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

So this is the image of the Son of Man and when he uses this term, the people in that room would have known. This is the image of the son of Man from Daniel 7 that sees the Son of Man coming into God's throne room at the Day of Judgment. This is Jesus in all his power. This isn't a meek and gentle Jesus, this is the Jesus who can also enter the throne room, can be part of the judgment of us all. And he therefore is saying, look, I can forgive because I will be part of the judgment. I am not just a healer here on Earth. I'm not just a teacher here on Earth. But I am God, and I am with God. And I will be there on Judgment Day. And so I have the power to forgive, because of all these things, but because I will be there I can forgive now, but also in the future. Tony is now going to read a second snippet. This is from CS Lewis.

'A man who was merely a man and said, the sorts of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic on the level with a man who says, He is a poached egg, or else he would be a devil of hell. You must make your choice, either this man was and is the son of God, or else a madman, or something worse, you could shut him up for a fool. You can spit at him and kill him as a demon. Or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a really great human teacher. He has not left that open to us, he did not intend to.

So I love that by CS Lewis. And I'm sure many of you have heard it many times. But I think that's exactly what this passage does. If Jesus had just healed the man, we would know he was powerful and that he could heal. But Jesus forgave the man. And in that moment of forgiveness, He does not leave that option open to us, that He is just a healer or just a good moral teacher. But actually, he is claiming to be much more, someone that we can only kneel down and worship unless we dismiss him as a lunatic or a madman. So we're gonna think now about this kind of costly sacrificing, crazy love for Jesus.

The other issue that the Pharisees could have raised was: Jesus was saying, it is me not the priests of the temple that can forgive. He is saying, I can do it in this messy room. I can forgive wherever I don't need to be in the temple. But there was another problem that the Pharisees could have raised for forgiveness according to the books of the law, and things like Leviticus. To access forgiveness, you needed to bring a

sacrifice and a sacrifice that matched very certain qualities. They needed to somehow be pure. And where was the sacrifice in this room, in this broken house? How was he able to forgive this man without the sacrifice. But of course, what we know is that Jesus knew that there would be a sacrifice that he wouldn't fall short of that either, but that he would also provide the sacrifice. And so we have an image of the Son of Man on the judgment day coming on the cloud and mighty with greater authority. But through the New Testament, as Jesus mentioned Himself as the son of man, he also mentioned the sacrifice and the humility that he will bear, the Son of Man is not a kind of Masonic warrior riding on a horse, but but a son of man who will dwell amongst us, and will face the kind of fragility of death for us. So in a later passage in Luke, it says, The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of the sinners, be crucified, and on the third day be raised again. Because of course, Jesus already knew that he would be the sacrifice, that he could forgive sins, because he would offer that. He wasn't off replacing the temple with an empty promise, but he knew he would fulfill that promise and eventually, he would be led to the cross and that he would die, and that there our sins would be paid for, and his blood will be shared, as we sung about earlier, and that our sins will be forgiven. So this was a radical rupture in power, he was showing who he was by offering forgiveness for sins. But he was also foreshadowing what he would have to do, that he would give his life for us, that it would be fulfilled. It wasn't just going to be fulfilled in the healing of the man, that show of power, but actually it fulfilled in a moment of vulnerability, through his fragility as a man that he would then die, and our sins will be forgiven.

If we go back to the story. So I think we end again on this image of the man being carried to Jesus. And he's being carried and the friends would not have even known, they probably heard rumors that he was a healer and they knew their friend needed healing, and they had a crazy friendship, and they wanted to support him. But unknowingly quite probably they were taking him to the person who really could offer forgiveness for their sins. And I would encourage us to think about the friends around us need to be carried to Jesus. And this is a story, it's not just that we should bring friends to Jesus. But this is a story about deep friendship, about the people who are loved by us who are known by us, who we know when they're going through good times and bad times. And so I would just end by encouraging us to pray about who we think needs to be taken to Jesus to this person who is the Son of Man on high but the Son of man who would also die first.