



-- Read Luke 5:17-26

-- Pray

-- **Video – Sixth Sense Clip – “I See Dead People”**

I share this movie clip with you this morning because I think there is a very enlightening sense in which this young boy’s peculiar vision a lot is like the unique perspective of Jesus that we see in our passage this morning. You see, both the boy in the movie and our Lord Jesus Christ are constantly and vividly aware of a remarkable and disturbing reality to which nearly everyone else around them seems utterly oblivious. Both of them see dead people roaming around everywhere, and the dead people they see do actually not know that they are dead because they see only what they want to see. And although these lifeless folk are not certain exactly what they need, they know that they are in desperate need of something.

The key difference, however, is that, in the movie, which, of course, is entirely fictitious, the boy sees the *physically* dead. In our passage today, on the other hand, Jesus reveals His flawless vision of an absolute reality that is far more intense even than the events of this classic cinematic thriller—whereas the boy sees the *physically dead*, Jesus sees the *spiritually* dead. That is, He sees people everywhere who are wandering through life, seeing only what they want to see, not knowing that they are dead in their sins, yet, at the same time, these walking dead are desperately seeking to be made whole.

The movie *The Sixth Sense*, then, provides an especially appropriate context in which to examine our passage this morning. In our text, we read of a man whose physical condition is far more desperate than most of us are ever likely to experience. We see in our text that his paralysis is so advanced that, in order to get to Jesus, He had to be carried there on his mat. Moreover, he was a paralyzed man living in a day and place where there was neither anywhere for the paralyzed to go nor any agencies organized to help them. In first century Galilee, this man would very likely have had no opportunity to provide for his needs, or even move from place to place, other than to depend upon the sympathy and kindness of others. Indeed, one can scarcely imagine a man with more obvious and overwhelming physical needs that this paralytic in our passage this morning.

Yet, as painfully obvious as this man's physical needs were, those physical ailments were not the most apparent need that Jesus saw. No, you see, Jesus clearly recognized the "elephant in the room" that everyone else was missing. Unlike the crowd that had crammed in around Him like olives in a jar... unlike this crowd that was chomping at the bit to witness the spectacle of Christ's astonishing powers... unlike this crowd that went so far as to dig a hole in the rooftop in order to have a chance to taste for themselves the miraculous healing about which they had heard—unlike them, Jesus' thoughts and purposes were not limited to the transient moments of the here and now. No, unlike them, Jesus gazed upon this and every situation with unblemished spiritual insight that looked beyond the temporary and understood what really matters. Jesus saw the eternal.

As debris from the rooftop collapsed upon their heads, and as this desperate, paralyzed man was outrageously lowered in the middle of the room, the crowd was fixated upon his piteous physical condition. But our Lord was not. Of course, Jesus recognized his intense physical needs, but to Jesus, this man's *physical* paralysis was distantly secondary to his *spiritual* paralysis. Whereas the men who enthusiastically lowered him saw a friend whom they hoped would walk again, Jesus saw a sinner separated from our loving Heavenly Father. Whereas the crowd eagerly delighted in the opportunity to witness another spectacle of the miraculous, Jesus delighted in the opportunity to offer forgiveness from sin to a man who came to Him in faith.

Thus, Jesus witnessed this extraordinary act of faith—faith in Him as one who had come from God with divine ability to heal—and He spoke to the paralytic saying, "*Friend, your sins are forgiven.*" ...And then, in a spontaneous moment of unusually keen spiritual insight, the crowd all around Jesus, including all of the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law, began jumping for joy and repenting of their sins! Right? No, this was not their reaction at all, was it?

Rather, the Pharisees, for their part, assumed their favorite activity and began grumbling against Jesus in their hearts. And what about the reaction of the rest of the crowd? How did they respond when Jesus rewarded their great efforts by saying, "*Friend, your sins are forgiven?*" Well, the truth is that we don't really know, because the Scriptures do not say. However, with that said, I believe that I can tell you with a fair degree of certainty that their response went something like this: "WHOOPEEADO!" I can almost hear their thoughts now: "His sins are forgiven?! What?! Hey buddy, that's LAME! Those men didn't carry that heavy fella all the way up here, dig a giant hole in the roof, and lower him all the way

back down to hear you say, ‘Your sins are forgiven!’ Whoopeadoo! What happened to the magic? Where is our miracle?!

- Being duped by Publisher’s Clearing House as a youth
- Reaction: Both disappointed and disgusted

I think that this is likely the way that the majority of the crowd felt about the statement, “*Your sins are forgiven.*” While the Pharisees were disgusted, I think the average person in attendance that day was more that a little disappointed. // Most of them had come to see a spectacle, not to observe a religious service. They wanted to be entertained, not engaged... captivated, not challenged. They were interested in sensations, not sins.

They came to receive miraculous assistance for their desperate needs, but they had no idea how desperate their need really was. They wanted physical strength and redemption from their sicknesses. Many of them even came wondering if this Jesus might be the long-awaited Messiah who had come to destroy their political enemies and bless Israel with worldly power and human possessions. These are some of the things that they *wanted*. Jesus, however, had come to give what they truly *needed*, and He was the only one in all of history who could do that.

As Jesus looked out on the crowd, He saw their reactions, and in verse 22 we are informed that our Lord even knew their private thoughts. He heard the unspoken contemplations of the Pharisees who were accusing Him of blasphemy, saying, “*Who can forgive sins but God alone?*” And—pay careful attention to this part—Jesus’ response to this question provides the key to understanding this passage. Not only so, but Christ’s reply here is foundational to any proper understanding of the entire Gospel of Luke. Even more, the answer Jesus gives in verses 22-24 is a critically important key to understanding any of the miraculous acts of Jesus recorded in all of Scripture, the ultimate example of which we celebrate today on Resurrection Sunday.

Look with me at Jesus’ response to the Pharisees in verses 22-23. “*Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, ‘Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk?’*” You see, other people had, in the past, been given power by God to say effectively words such as “*Get up and walk.*” We especially see this in Old Testament ministries of Elijah and Elisha. Theses two prophets, as well as a selection of others, were able, by God’s power at work within them, to heal the sick and even raise the dead to live again on earth. However, never before Jesus

and never after Jesus has anyone other than Jesus Himself been qualified by God to say, *“Your sins are forgiven.”* This is and will always remain the unique prerogative of our resurrected Lord who gave His perfect life for us.

Let it be known without absolute clarity this Easter morning that no one and nothing other than Jesus Christ alone has the power to forgive our sin. As the time-honored hymn declares, “What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.” Let it be completely understood today that our good deeds will simply never get the job done. Know this, no one, not even the great Billy Graham or Mother Teresa herself has ever or will ever be able to earn a place in heaven. The Apostle Paul makes this point crystal clear in Ephesians 2:8-9, when he writes, *“God saved you by his special favor when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.”* And Isaiah 64:6 says the following about our good works: *“All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.”*

Indeed, there is surely no sentence known to man that is uttered with more difficulty than that which is spoken by our Lord in our passage today. Why? Because to say, *“Your sins are forgiven”* is the right of the Son of God alone, and He purchased that supreme privilege by living a life without sin of any kind. // He acquired that right through the pain, the shame, and the scorn of the cross. // He earned that claim in His glorious resurrection from the grave. Although the crowd around was less than impressed by this declaration, they should have fallen on their knees in unprecedented worship.

Let me ask you, what is your response today to the Son of God who alone has the power to forgive your sin? Are you like the Pharisees, angry that anyone would dare to tell you that you are a sinner in need of God's mercy? Or are you more like the crowd, so mesmerized by your pursuit of worldly experiences that you have become numb to the reality of your severe spiritual need for the forgiveness that only Christ can offer? How will you respond to Jesus on this Easter Sunday?

Now look with me at verses 24 and 25. Jesus continued, *“But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins....’ He said to the paralyzed man, ‘I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.’ Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God.”* When I mentioned earlier that the response Jesus gives here is a foundational key to understanding any of His miracles recorded in Scripture, I was

primarily pointing ahead to these verses. In other words, if you and I are going to understand the life and ministry of Jesus properly, then it is essential that we recognize the centrality of this verse.

You know, if Jesus had been teaching children here as opposed to the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law, I think He might have introduced verse 24 with a statement such as this: “Okay now, children, pay careful attention to my next statement, because in it I am going to explain why I am performing all of these miracles. You see, there is a greater purpose than you probably realize, and, right now, I am just about to tell you the real reason why I have been doing all of these healings and why I have been driving out demons. Are you ready? Here it comes...”

And then comes our instrumental verse, verse 24, in which Jesus replies, “*‘But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins....’* He said to the paralyzed man, *‘I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.’*” You see, we misunderstand Jesus’ life and we misinterpret His purpose if we believe that He performed miracles for the sake of those miracles alone. Of course, Jesus was delighted to see people healed from diseases, but that healing was not the main reason for the miracle. Obviously, Jesus was happy to restore sight to the blind, but that restoration itself was not His primary goal. We can be sure that Jesus was pleased to drive out demons, but there was more to all of these miracles than the mere phenomenon. And in this verse, Jesus tells us precisely what that divine purpose is—forgiveness.

You see, Jesus miraculously healed people of their physical ailments in order to reveal His divine authority to heal them from their much more serious spiritual ailment of sinfulness. He drove out demons to demonstrate His power to drive sin from our lives. He even raised people from the dead to exhibit His singular ability to grant us everlasting life in heaven through the forgiveness He came to purchase. Why did Jesus tell the paralytic to “*Get up and walk*”? Just as He Himself says in verse 24: He did so “*that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.*”

Thus, as this paralyzed man was lowered in front of Him, Jesus saw in him a much more intense need than his physical healing; Jesus saw his spiritually dead condition and recognized his immense need for forgiveness. Jesus met the lesser need—the need to walk again—in order to demonstrate His power to meet our

greatest need—the need to be forgiven of our sin. In short, every miraculous act of Christ is not ultimately about the physical needs He meets. Rather, He meets those physical needs in order to point beyond them to His infinitely greater ability to meet our deeper spiritual needs. And, simply put, our greatest spiritual need—indeed, our greatest need of any kind at all—is to receive the forgiveness that Jesus Christ secured on the very first Easter, because only through that forgiveness can we be reconciled to our Holy God. Only by that forgiveness can we gain entrance into heaven.

That is why we celebrate today. We rejoice in the resurrection of Christ because, in it, the forgiveness of sin through Jesus Christ is guaranteed once and for all. We commemorate the fact that God’s great love for us gave birth to the rebirth of our Savior. Why, you may ask, would God sacrifice His only Son? Why the suffering? Why the pain? Why the blood? Why the cross? Why the shame, the agony, the death? Why the miraculous resurrection we celebrate today? Because, more than anything else imaginable, what you and I need most is forgiveness, and forgiveness is at the very heart of Easter.

-- Video – “This Hand”

Indeed, forgiveness is the essence of Easter. I hope that video made you think, and I pray it made you thankful. Please do not misunderstand the video and think that we only need God’s forgiveness for “major” sins such as adultery and murder. Remember that, in the Sermon on the Mount (in Matthew chapters 5-7), Jesus says that a lustful look is akin to adultery, and He tells us that calling another a fool is like committing murder in our hearts. There is no one exempt from grace; we all need forgiveness. Also, it is essential that all of us understand this: Although the forgiveness of which we speak is freely offered to everyone, not everyone receives it. It is given only to those who willingly accept it through genuine faith in Jesus Christ.

In closing, then, let me ask you: What do you think is your greatest need today? I pray that we have learned from our passage that not even the severe physical needs of a desperate paralytic are greater than the need that each of us has for the mercy that comes only through the blood of Jesus Christ. You may not have realized this essential truth before today, but I pray that you understand it now. I hope that each of us sees that, just like the ghosts in the movie, without Jesus Christ we are all dead people walking. No matter what we think we may need, there is nothing, nor will there ever *be* anything, that you and I need more than our need to ask for and receive the forgiveness God has made possible through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let me ask you, are you forgiven? Have you turned away from your sins and given your life to Jesus Christ? Are you sure? Please do not leave here today uncertain about your relationship with Jesus Christ. Would you like to be sure? Pray with me.