

Luke: 5:17–26

From Catena Aurea:

17. And it came to pass on a certain day, as he was teaching, that there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by, which were come out of every town of Galilee, and Judæa, and Jerusalem: and the power of the Lord was present to heal them.

18. And, behold, men brought in a bed a man which was taken with a palsy: and they sought means to bring him in, and to lay him before him.

19. And when they could not find by what way they might bring him in because of the multitude, they went upon the housetop, and let him down through the tiling with his couch into the midst before Jesus.

20. And when he saw their faith, he said unto him, Man, thy sins are forgiven thee.

21. And the Scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, Who is this which speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?

22. But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answering said unto them, What reason ye in your hearts?

23. Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk?

24. But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins, (he said unto the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go unto thine house.

25. And immediately he rose up before them, and took up that whereon he lay, 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 to day.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA. The Scribes and Pharisees who had become spectators of Christ's miracles, heard Him also teaching. Hence it is said, And it came to pass on a certain day, as he was teaching, that there were Pharisees sitting by, &c. And the power of the Lord was present to heal them. Not as though He borrowed the power of another, but as God and the Lord He healed by His own inherent power. Now

men often become worthy of spiritual gifts, but generally depart from the rule which the giver of the gifts knew. It was not so with Christ, for the divine power went on abounding in giving remedies. But because it was necessary where so great a number of Scribes and Pharisees had come together, that something should be done to attest His power before those men who slighted Him, He performed the miracle on the man with the palsy, who since medical art seemed to fail, was carried by his kinsfolk to a higher and heavenly Physician. As it follows, And behold men brought him.

CHRYSOSTOM. But they are to be admired who brought in the paralytic, since on finding that they could not enter in at the door, they attempted a new and untried way. As it follows, And when they could not find by what way they might bring him in, they went upon the housetop, &c. But unroofing the house they let down the couch, and place the paralytic in the midst, as it follows, And they let him down through the things. Some one may say, that the place was let down, from which they lowered the couch of the palsied man through the things.

AMBROSE. Mighty is the Lord who pardons one man for the good deed of another, and while he approves of the one, forgives the other his sins. Why, O man, with thee does not thy fellowman prevail, when with God a servant has both the liberty to intercede in thy behalf, and the power of obtaining what he asks? If thou despairest of the pardon of heavy sins, bring the prayers of others, bring the Church to pray for thee, and at sight of this the Lord may pardon what otherwise He might deny to thee.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. 29. in Matt.) But there was combined in this the faith also of the sufferer himself. For he would not have submitted to be let down, had he not believed.

AUGUSTINE. (de con. Ev. lib. ii. c. 25.) But our Lord's saying, Man, thy sins are forgiven, conveys the meaning that the man had his sins forgiven him, because in that he was man, he could not say, "I have not sinned," but at the same time also, that He who forgave sins might be known to be God.

CHRYSOSTOM. (ubi sup.) Now if we suffer bodily, we are enough concerned to get rid of the hurtful thing; but when there has harm happened to the soul, we delay, and so are neither cured of our bodily ailments. Let us then remove the fountain of evil, and the waters of sickness will cease to flow. But from fear of the multitude, the Pharisees durst not openly expose their designs, but only meditated them in their hearts Hence it follows, And they began to reason, saying, Who is this which speaketh blasphemies?

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA. By this they hasten the sentence of death, for it was commanded in the law, that whoever blasphemed God should be punished with death. (Lev. 24:16.)

AMBROSE. From the Pharisees themselves therefore the Son of God receives testimony. For it is both more powerful evidence when men confess unwillingly, and a more fatal error when they who deny are left to the consequence of their own assertions. Hence it follows, Who can forgive sins, but God only? Great is the madness of an unbelieving people, who though they have confessed that it is of God alone to forgive sins, believe not God when He forgives sins.

AMBROSE. The Lord wishing to save sinners shews Himself to be God, by His knowledge of the secret thoughts; as it follows, But that ye may know.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA. As if to say, O Pharisees, since ye say, Who can forgive sins, but God alone? I answer you, Who can search the secrets of the heart, but God alone, Who says by His prophet, I am the Lord, that searcheth the hearts, and trieth the reins. (Jer. 17:10.)

CHRYSOSTOM. (ubi sup.) If then you disbelieve the first, (i. e. the forgiveness of sins,) behold, I add another, seeing that I lay open your inmost thoughts. Again, another that I make whole the body of the palsied man. Hence He adds, Whether is it easier? It is very plain that it is easier to restore the body to health. For as the soul is far nobler than the body, so is the forgiveness of sins more excellent than the healing of the body. But since you believe not the former, because it is hid; I will add that which is inferior, yet more open, in order that thereby that which is secret may be made manifest. And indeed in addressing the sick man, He said not, I forgive thee thy sins, expressing His own power, but, Thy sins are forgiven thee. But they compelled Him to declare more plainly His own power to them, when He said, But that you may know.

THEOPHYLACT. Observe that on earth He forgives sins. For while we are on earth we can blot out our sins. But after that we are taken away from the earth, we shall not be able to confess, for the gate is shut.

CHRYSOSTOM. (ubi sup.) He shews the pardon of sins by the healing of the body. Hence it follows, He says unto the sick of the palsy, I say unto thee, Rise. But He manifests the healing of the body by the carrying of the bed, that so that which took place might be accounted no shadow. Hence it follows, Take up thy bed. As if He said, "I was willing through thy suffering to cure those who think that they are in health, while their souls are sick, but since they are unwilling, go and correct thy household."

AMBROSE. Nor is there any delay, health is present; there is but one moment both of words, and healing. Hence it follows, And immediately he rose. From this fact it is evident, that the Son of man has power on earth to forgive sins; He said this both for Himself and us. For He as God made man, as the Lord of the

law, forgives sins; we also have been chosen to receive from Him the same marvellous grace. For it was said to the disciples, Whose sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them. (John 20:23.) But how does He not Himself forgive sins, Who has given to others the power of doing so? But the kings and princes of the earth when they acquit homicides, release them from their present punishment, but cannot expiate their crimes.

AMBROSE. They behold him rising up, still disbelieving, and marvel at his departing; as it follows, And they were all amazed.

CHRYSOSTOM. (ubi sup.) The Jews creep on by degrees, glorifying God, yet thinking Him not God, for His flesh stood in their way. But still it was no slight thing to consider Him the chief of mortal men, and to have proceeded from God.

AMBROSE. But they had rather fear the miracles of divine working, than believe them. As it follows, And they were filled with fear. But if they had believed they had not surely feared, but loved; for perfect love casteth out fear. But this was no careless or trifling cure of the paralytic, since our Lord is said to have prayed first, not for the petition's sake, but for an example.

AUGUSTINE. (l. ii. qu. 4.) With respect to the sick of the palsy, we may understand that the soul relaxed in its limbs, i. e. its operations, seeks Christ, i. e. the meaning of God's word; but is hindered by the crowds, that is to say, unless it discovers the secrets of the thoughts, i. e. the dark parts of the Scriptures, and thereby arrives at the knowledge of Christ.

AMBROSE. Now let every sick person have those that will pray for his salvation, by whom the loosened joints of our life and halting steps may be renewed by the remedy of the heavenly word. Let there be then certain monitors of the soul, to raise the mind of man, though grown dull through the weakness of the external body, to higher things, by the aid of which being able again easily to raise and humble itself, it may be placed before Jesus worthy to be presented in the Lord's sight. For the Lord beholdeth the humble.

AUGUSTINE. (ubi sup.) The men then by whom he is let down may signify the doctors of the Church. But that he is let down with the couch, signifies that Christ ought to be known by man, while yet abiding in his flesh.

AMBROSE. But the Lord, pointing out the full hope of resurrection, pardons the sins of the soul, sets aside the weakness of the flesh. For this is the curing of the whole man. Although then it is a great thing to

forgive the sins of men, it is yet much more divine to give resurrection to the bodies, since indeed God is the resurrection. But the bed which is ordered to be taken up is nothing else but the human body.

AUGUSTINE. (ubi sup.) That the infirm soul may no more rest in carnal joys, as in a bed, but rather itself restrain the carnal affections, and tend toward its own home, i. e. the resting-place of the secrets of its heart.

AMBROSE. Or it may reseek its own home, i. e. return to Paradise, for that is its true home, which first received man, and was lost not fairly, but by treachery. Rightly then is the soul restored thither, since He has come Who will undo the treacherous knot, and reestablish righteousness.

From Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture:

5:17–19 The Paralytic and His Friends

Sick People and Sinners Need Intercessors.

Ambrose: You who judge, learn to excuse! You who are sick, learn to accomplish. If you do not trust in the forgiveness of grave sinners, call intercessors, call the church who will pray for you. Because of his regard for the church, the Lord forgives what he may refuse you. And although we must not neglect the faith in the narrative, so that we may indeed believe that the body of the paralytic was healed, we must also acknowledge the healing of the inner man whose sins are forgiven. Exposition of the Gospel of Luke 5.11–12.

5:20 The Miracle of Forgiveness

Jesus Heals Spiritually and Physically.

Cyril of Alexandria: When the Savior says to him, “Man, your sins are forgiven you,” he addresses this to humankind in general. For those who believe in him, being healed of the diseases of the soul, will receive forgiveness of the sins which they formerly committed. He may also mean this: “I must heal your soul before I heal your body. If this is not done, by obtaining strength to walk, you will only sin more. Even though you have not asked for this, I as God see the maladies of the soul which brought on you this disease.” Commentary on Luke, Homily 12.

Jesus Cures the Whole Person.

Ambrose: But the Lord, wanting to save sinners, shows himself to be God both by his knowledge of secrets and by the wonder of his actions. He adds, “Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Rise and walk?’ ” In this passage he shows the full likeness of the resurrection. Alongside of healing the wounds of body and mind, he also forgives the sins of the spirits, removes the weakness of the flesh, and thus heals the whole person. It is a great thing to forgive people’s sins—who can forgive sins, but God alone? For God also forgives through those to whom he has given the power of forgiveness. Yet it is far more divine to give resurrection to bodies, since the Lord himself is the resurrection. Exposition of the Gospel of Luke 5.12–13.

5:21–24 The Dispute

Pharisees Doubt Jesus is God.

Ephrem the Syrian: While the Pharisee doubted that our Lord was a prophet, he was unwittingly pledging himself to the truth by thinking, “If this man were a prophet, he would know that this woman is a sinner.” Therefore, if our Lord indeed knows that she is a sinner, then, Pharisee, by your own reasoning he indeed is a prophet. And so our Lord did not hesitate to point out not only that she was a sinner but also that she had sinned very much, so that the testimony of his own mouth would trap the accuser. [The Pharisee] was one of those who had said, “Who can forgive sins but God alone?” Our Lord took this testimony from them, that whoever is able to forgive sin is God. From this point on, the struggle was for our Lord to show them whether or not he was able to forgive sin. And so he quickly healed the parts [of the body] that were visible, to confirm that he had forgiven the sins which were not visible. Homily on Our Lord 21.1.

Jesus Who Knows the Hearts and Minds Also Forgives Sins.

Cyril of Alexandria: He then, as was said, announced forgiveness of sins, since he is endowed with a most godlike authority. But the declaration disturbed again the ignorant and envious gang of the Pharisees. They said one to another, “Who is this that speaks blasphemies?” But would you have said this about him, Pharisee, if you had known the divine Scriptures, and borne in mind the words of prophecy, and understood the adorable and mighty mystery of the incarnation? Instead, they now involve him in a charge of blasphemy, bringing against him the uttermost penalty and condemning him to death. The law of Moses commanded that whoever spoke blasphemies against God should be put to death. But no sooner

have they arrived at this height of daring, than he immediately shows that he is God, to convict them once more of intolerable impiety, “Why do you question in your hearts?” If you, therefore, Pharisee, say, “Who can forgive sins but God only?” I will also say to you, “Who can know hearts, and see the thoughts hidden in the depth of the understanding, but God only?” For he himself says somewhere by the voice of the prophets, “I, the Lord, search the minds and try the heart.” David also said somewhere concerning both him and us, “He who fashions the hearts of them all.” Therefore he who as God knows both the hearts and minds, as God also forgives sins. Commentary on Luke, Homily 12.

5:25–26 The Miracle of Healing

Jesus Gives to His Church Power to Heal and Forgive.

Cyril of Alexandria: A place still remains open for disbelief when it is said, “Your sins are forgiven you” — for people cannot see the forgiven sins with the eyes of the body. By contrast, the putting off of the disease and the paralytic’s rising up and walking carries with it a clear demonstration of a godlike power. Jesus adds, “Rise, take up your bed and go home.” And he returned to his house, delivered from the infirmity from which he had so long suffered. This very fact proves that the Son of man has power on earth to forgive sins. But to whom does he refer when he says this? Himself only, or us too? Both the one and the other are true. For he forgives sins as the incarnate God, the Lord of the law. We too have received from him this splendid and most admirable grace. He has crowned human nature with this great honor also, having even said to the holy apostles, “Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” And again, “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” And what is the occasion on which we find him speaking this to them? It was after he had trampled on the power of death and risen from the grave, when he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” After he had made them partakers of his nature and bestowed upon them the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, he also made them sharers of his glory, by giving them power both to remit and to bind sins. And as we have been commanded to perform this very act, how much more must he himself remit sins, when he gives to others authority to enable them to do so? Commentary on Luke, Homily 12.

To Return Home is to Return to Paradise.

Ambrose: What is this bed which he is commanded to take up, as he is told to rise? It is the same bed which was washed by David every night, the bed of pain on which our soul lay sick with the cruel torment of conscience. But if anyone has acted according to Christ's teaching, it is already not a bed of pain but of repose. Indeed, through the compassion of the Lord, who turns for us the sleep of death into the grace of delight, that which was death begins to be repose. Not only is he ordered to take up his bed, but also to go home to his house, that is, to return to Paradise. That is our true home which first fostered man, lost not lawfully, but by deceit. Therefore, rightfully is the home restored, since he who would abolish the obligation of deceit and reform the law has come. Exposition of the Gospel of Luke 5.14.