

The Paradox of the Gospel

Luke 5:17-26 NKJV

17 Now it happened on a certain day, as He was teaching, that there were Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting by, who had come out of every town of Galilee, Judea, and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was present to heal them.

18 Then behold, men brought on a bed a man who was paralyzed, whom they sought to bring in and lay before Him.

19 And when they could not find how they might bring him in, because of the crowd, they went up on the housetop and let him down with his bed through the tiling into the midst before Jesus.

20 When He saw their faith, He said to him, “Man, your sins are forgiven you.”

21 And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, “Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

22 But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, He answered and said to them, “Why are you reasoning in your hearts?”

23 Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Rise up and walk’?

24 But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins”-He said to the man who was paralyzed, “I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.”

25 Immediately he rose up before them, took up what he had been lying on, 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 today!”

- *In the story of the healing of the paralyzed man there are a number of important themes. However, we are only going to focus on a couple of them. Although the man was in need of physical healing he was in even greater need of forgiveness. Sickness may have paralyzed his physical body, but sin had wrought havoc on his soul. Therefore, when Jesus saw him in his great need He said, “Man, your sins are forgiven you.”*
- *This story also reveals that there is sometimes a link between sin and sickness, and between forgiveness and healing. Sometimes spiritual healing precedes physical healing.*
- *The Jewish religious leaders’ response to Jesus’ words were filled with incredulity. “Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?”*
- *Jesus, undeterred by their unbelief and hostility, posed a simple question to prove the veracity of His authority to forgive sins. “Why are you reasoning in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Rise up and walk’?”*
- *Jesus then commanded the paralyzed man to rise, take up his bed and walk. Jesus healed the man not only because He had compassion for him “but that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins.” The man’s physical healing*

was a tangible sign that his sins had been forgiven. Free from paralysis, he was free to move forward in faith.

- *When the paralyzed man immediately stood up and not only walked but picked up his bed all the people were filled with awe. “And they were all amazed, and they glorified God and were filled with fear, saying, “We have seen strange things today!””*
- *The people were filled with amazement and fear. They glorified God and then made an interesting statement, “We have seen strange things today!”*
- *The Greek word translated as “strange things” is a very interesting word and is only found in this one verse in the entire New Testament. This Greek word is παράδοξος (paradoxos) from which we derive our English word—paradox. A paradox is a statement or proposition that seems self-contradictory or absurd but in reality expresses a truth.*
- *The people were not simply saying, “We have seen some amazing miracle,” they were saying something more profound. “We have seen something that is difficult to explain, something that appears totally contrary to what we believe is possible.”*
- *What was the truth of this paradox that had perplexed all the people? It wasn’t simply that a paralyzed man was instantly healed, it was something much more. Jesus, who was a man, had authority to forgive sins!*
- *The religious leaders had just declared that only God can forgive sins and now Jesus through the miracle of healing the paralytic man had proven He had the authority to forgive the man’s sins. Now the people were confronted with this astounding paradox of who Jesus really was. He was a man but He must be more than a man?! How could Jesus being a man forgive sins? The religious leaders’ statement that only God can forgive sins and Jesus’ healing of the paralytic posed a seemingly impossible paradox which confounded all the people!*
- *The Gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ, is filled with paradoxes, things that appear to contradict themselves, but in reality are true. For this reason Paul often referred to the “secret of the gospel.” (Ephesians 6:19).*
- *The paradoxes found in the Gospel are not only perplexing but even an affront to man’s wisdom found in this world, but are totally reasonable when seen from the perspective of eternity and Heaven. “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:18).*
- *The paradoxes found in the Gospel have been carefully placed there by God to resist the proud. “For it is written: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.” Where is the wise? Where is the scribe?*

Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?" (1 Corinthians 1:19-20).

- *Man's first sin was to choose the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil over the Tree of Life. They chose self-exaltation over knowing God. Ever since, man has sought to find truth independent of God, by proudly relying on their own wisdom. God has chosen to reveal Himself only to those who humble themselves and simply believe His message. "For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe." (1 Corinthians 1:21).*
- *Some highly intelligent people look at the complexity of creation and specifically the complexity and design found in biological life and conclude that it is the result of mindless random chance! The very obvious fact that these complexities have been created by a super intelligent Being eludes them even though the facts stare them right in the face. They choose to disregard the facts and reject the reality that God exists. The infinite complexity of life which is a paradox in the minds of unbelieving men is perfectly reasonable to those who know God.*
- *The paradox of the Gospel is that salvation is an invitation not only to the strong or the wise, but to all. Those who are wise or educated have no greater advantage than a small child to receive the gift of salvation. Jesus said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 18:3).*
- *"but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." (1 Corinthians 1:23-24).*
- *The truths found in the Gospel are so simple and straightforward that even a young child can easily understand God's plan of salvation. At the same time these truths are so deep and profound that we could spend a lifetime studying and exploring the deep secrets of the Gospel and never grow bored or understand the depths of God's wisdom. The Gospel is like the ocean where a child can safely wade in from the beach and enjoy it without fear of drowning, while at the same time Scripture contains depths no man can fully fathom. "Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men." (1 Corinthians 1:25).*
- *God does not call the wise but those who will respond with humility and put their faith in Him. "For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called." (1 Corinthians 1:26).*
- *God has chosen to save those who are willing to acknowledge their sins and their brokenness but He shames those who are proud and feign being righteous, wise, and strong. "But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which*

are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.” (1 Corinthians 1:27-29).

- *The joy we have as followers of Jesus is that our wisdom or righteousness is not based on anything we have done but on what He has already done for us. “But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—that, as it is written, “He who glories, let him glory in the LORD.”” (1 Corinthians 1:30-31).*
- *The wonderful news of the Gospel is that God calls everyone to salvation no matter who we are or how we have failed or what we have done. If we respond He receives us with open arms, the same arms that were stretched out on the cross of Calvary. “For the Scripture says, “Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.” For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For “whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.”” (Romans 10:11-13).*
- *God delights to reveal the paradoxes in the Gospel message. He opens them to us so we can understand and delight in them. God shares His secrets with His friends! “No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.” (John 15:15).*
- *Once someone confronted my brother, Harvey, and said, “I don’t believe that a man can become God.” My brother’s response was immediate. “I agree with you, I also don’t believe that a man can become God but I believe God can become a Man!” Man is limited in what he can do, but God is unlimited in what He can do.*
- *The great paradox of the Christian faith is “that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.” (2 Corinthians 5:19). God did become a man!*
- *The paradox of the Gospel is that Jesus who was pure and holy became our sin offering so we who were defiled and unholy could become pure and holy. “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” (2 Corinthians 5:21).*
- *The paradox of the cross is that when a sinner, who is impure, touches Jesus who is pure, Jesus does not become unclean but we become clean!*
- *The Gospel is founded on the reality that God became Man through the incarnation of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16).*

- *The paradox that confronted the Jewish religious leaders is that they limited God and did not believe the Word of God, that God could and would come as a man. The great Messianic prophecy found in Isaiah begins with these words. “Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?” (Isaiah 53:1).*

Isaiah 59:15-17 NKJV

¹⁵ So truth fails, And he who departs from evil makes himself a prey. Then the LORD saw it, and it displeased Him That there was no justice.

¹⁶ He saw that there was no man, And wondered that there was no intercessor; Therefore His own arm brought salvation for Him; And His own righteousness, it sustained Him.

¹⁷ For He put on righteousness as a breastplate, And a helmet of salvation on His head; He put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, And was clad with zeal as a cloak.

- *God recognized and foresaw that man in his lost state was hopelessly condemned to eternal destruction and that there was no one to help. So God Himself came as that Mighty Warrior and the Perfect Intercessor and put on the garments of war—the breastplate of righteousness, the helmet of salvation, the garments of vengeance and the cloak of zeal.*
- *The Jews looked forward to when God would come as a mighty warrior and save them from all their enemies, but the paradox is that He would come in a form that they would neither recognize nor accept. “He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, There is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.” (Isaiah 53:2b-3).*
- *Jesus was to come twice—first as a Suffering Servant to be the Saviour and the second time as the conquering King to vanquish all His enemies and bring judgment. The first time that Jesus came, He came in a form that the Jews did not recognize. “For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, And as a root out of dry ground.” (Isaiah 53:2a).*
- *One of the great paradoxes of the Gospel is that God came to save His people not in the clothing of a mighty warrior but as a helpless baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and totally dependent upon those entrusted with His care. “Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which is translated, “God with us.” (Matthew 1:23 and referencing Isaiah 7:14)*
- *When the religious leaders sought reasons to condemn Jesus to death they lined up many false witnesses but all their testimonies proved untrue. Jesus had no one to defend Him and He did not defend Himself. “Now the chief priests and all the council sought testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, but found none. For many bore false witness against Him, but their testimonies did not agree.” (Mark 14:55-56).*
- *The Jewish religious leaders’ motivation for condemning Jesus was also a paradox. They weren’t motivated by their zeal for the Law or their desire to see God glorified.*

Actually they were envious of Jesus. “But Pilate answered them, saying, “Do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?” For he knew that the chief priests had handed Him over because of envy.” (Mark 15:9–10).

- *The religious leaders were envious of the Creator of the Universe because the people were being drawn to Him! Jesus exposed the motivation of their evil hearts when He taught a parable of a landowner who sent his beloved son to them after they had rebuffed and mistreated the servants He sent. “Then the owner of the vineyard said, ‘What shall I do? I will send my beloved son. Probably they will respect him when they see him.’ But when the vinedressers saw him, they reasoned among themselves, saying, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours.’” (Luke 20:13-14).*
- *After the religious leaders tried to entrap Jesus with false witnesses, Jesus Himself provided the testimony that would result in His death by declaring His true identity. They asked Jesus, ““Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?” Jesus said, “I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.” Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, “What further need do we have of witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy! What do you think?” And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death.” (Mark 14:61b-64).*

John 19:6–8 (NKJV)

⁶Therefore, when the chief priests and officers saw Him, they cried out, saying, “Crucify Him, crucify Him!” Pilate said to them, “You take Him and crucify Him, for I find no fault in Him.”

⁷The Jews answered him, “We have a law, and according to our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God.”

⁸Therefore, when Pilate heard that saying, he was the more afraid,

- *The paradox of the crucifixion is that Jesus was condemned because “We have a law, and according to our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God.” The truth is that the Law never said that if someone declares himself the Son of God he must be put to death. They tried to twist and add to the Law in order to justify their envy and hatred of Jesus.*
- *However, unbeknownst to the religious leaders, in another way they were correct because the Law and the Prophets did foretell that Son of God would come as a Man and die for the sins of mankind. “But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed.” “Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, And the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand. He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, For He shall bear their iniquities.” (Isaiah 53:5, 10-11).*

- *The Jewish religious leaders were totally correct that Jesus had to die “because He made Himself the Son of God.” However, their reasoning was completely faulty. Jesus didn’t die because He had blasphemed by stating He was the Son of God, but because He had spoken the truth.*
- *Jesus was condemned because “He made Himself the Son of God” and who else could make Himself the Son of God but God! The Almighty eternal God left eternity and took on the form of a man with all its limitations so Jesus “who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.” (Hebrews 2:9).*
- *One of the greatest paradoxes of Calvary is that the Son of God, the Creator of the Universe, the Almighty, was scourged, spit upon, mocked, stripped naked, and nailed to a cross and hung there helplessly to die.*

Matthew 27:28–31 (NKJV)

²⁸And they stripped Him and put a scarlet robe on Him.

²⁹When they had twisted a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand. And they bowed the knee before Him and mocked Him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!”

³⁰Then they spat on Him, and took the reed and struck Him on the head.

³¹And when they had mocked Him, they took the robe off Him, put His own clothes on Him, and led Him away to be crucified.

John 19:19–22 (NKJV)

¹⁹Now Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross. And the writing was: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS

²⁰Then many of the Jews read this title, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin.

²¹Therefore the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, “Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews,’ but, ‘He said, “I am the King of the Jews.” ’ ”

²²Pilate answered, “What I have written, I have written.”

- *The paradox of Jesus hanging on the cross is accentuated by the fact that His true title was written on the cross—JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. It was written in Hebrew, Greek and Latin for all to read and understand.*

Matthew 27:39-44

39 And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads

40 and saying, "You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross."

41 Likewise the chief priests also, mocking with the scribes and elders, said,

42 "He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him.

43 He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'"

44 Even the robbers who were crucified with Him reviled Him with the same thing.

- *As Jesus hung on the cross in totally agony not just from His physical suffering, but much more as He became that sin offering to carry the sins of mankind upon His soul and body, His true divine nature and the very purpose for His coming in the first place is expressed through His words, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.” (Luke 23:43a).*
- *No one ever lived like Jesus and no one ever died like Jesus. “And Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and breathed His last. Then the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. So when the centurion, who stood opposite Him, saw that He cried out like this and breathed His last, he said, “Truly this Man was the Son of God!”” (Mark 15:37-39). Jesus was fully the Son of God and fully the Son of Man which to the naturally minded person is the greatest paradox.*

The resurrection of Jesus Christ completes the paradoxes of Calvary. Jesus who died is now alive forever more! “And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, “Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.” (Revelation 1:17-18).

- *We, who are believers in Jesus, can through His resurrection also experience the paradox that although we are weak we can live a victorious life. “For though He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God toward you.” (2 Corinthians 13:4).*
- *There is another paradox that we are going to explore. The Jews in their zeal not to take the name of the Lord in vain removed the vowels from His name so that no one knows how it should be pronounced. Some have pronounced it as Jehovah and others as Yahweh but in truth we are not completely sure how to say His Divine name.*
- *This poses a couple of interesting questions. “If we do not know how to pronounce the name of God then has something been lost? “Why would God allow the Jews to drop the vowels so that no one actually knows how to pronounce His name?”*
- *In reality I think it is very prophetic that the Jews do not pronounce the name of Yahweh and indeed do not even know how to pronounce His name.*
- *God the Father has made His Son both Lord and Christ. “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” (Acts 2:36).*
- *What is every tongue going to confess? Jesus Christ is Lord. Therefore we see the absolute pinnacle of all that God the Father does is to glorify God the Son by exalting His name and that “every tongue should confess that He is Lord to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:11).*

- *We can see Jesus Christ's presence woven throughout the entire Old Testament in many ways.*
- *The Hebrew Word for "Yahweh" is translated in the Septuagint as Lord (kyrios). Therefore the name Jehovah or Yahweh can really be seen as a revelation of Jesus Christ.*
- *Exodus 20:7 warns against taking the Lord's name in vain. However, this does not necessarily mean using God's name as a curse word but something much more profound. The word "vain" means "emptiness, without purpose, for nothing." It means to be called by His name or to identify as one of His followers, but then live a life that is unworthy and brings shame to His name.*
- *Israel was already taking His name in vain because "Israel" means "God prevails" and when they were unfaithful and lived lives defeated by sin they were carrying His name in vain and all the nations around them mocked both Israel and their God.*
- *Likewise, Christ has given us His name and we are called Christians and we represent Him. He wants each of His followers to become disciples and learn how to live holy and victorious lives by the power of the Holy Spirit. However, if we choose not to become disciples then we have taken his name in vain, with no effect or change in our lives.*
- *However, there is a secret contained in the unpronounced name of God. Hebrew is a pictographic language which means that every letter is a picture that contains a meaning.*

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Yod – "hand"

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Hey – “window”; “look”; “behold”;

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Vav – “hook”; “peg”; “nail”

“Behold the hand; behold the nail.” Jehovah; Yahweh; LORD!

- *Psalm 22 clearly prophetically depicts Christ’s crucifixion. “For dogs have surrounded Me; The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet.” (Psalm 22:16).*
- *The day will come when Israel will be gathered at the Mount of Olives and Christ will appear to them and the first thing they will see are the wounds in His hands. “And one shall say unto him, What are these wounds in thine hands? Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends.” (Zechariah 13:6, KJV).*
- *“And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn.” (Zechariah 12:10). Finally, Israel will recognize their Messiah and their God. They will look upon His nailed scarred hands and weep when they realize what they have done. Then Jesus will gather them together and speak words of comfort, peace, and love to Israel.*
- *They will finally understand the name of their God—“behold the hands, behold the nails.” They will say “Yahweh.” They will call Jesus Christ their Lord. And then this prophecy will be fulfilled. “And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: “The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob.”” (Romans 11:26).*
- *When Thomas resisted believing that Jesus had truly been resurrected, Jesus appeared to prove that He is the Son of God. Jesus proved to Thomas the truth that He is the Son of God with the most profound, gentle and humbling gesture. “Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.” (John 20:27). Thomas’ response was immediate and unequivocal. “And Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!”” (John 20:28).*

- *The very last paradox we are going to touch on does not deal with Jesus but with us as His followers. How is it that after everything Jesus has done for us it is so easy for our love and devotion to Him to grow cold? Jesus even warns us “And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.” (Matthew 24:12).*

1 Corinthians 11:23–26 (NKJV)

²³**For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread;**

²⁴**and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, “Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.”**

²⁵**In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.”**

²⁶**For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes.**

- *Jesus gave us the ordinance of communion to be a tangible reminder of all that He has done for us.*