

Paul Harvey told about a small college basketball coach who was shaving when his wife called upstairs to tell him that *Sports Illustrated* was on the phone. The coach was so excited that he nicked himself shaving. ... He was so eager for recognition for himself and his school... that while rushing to the phone he fell down the stairs and bruised himself. ... Staggering to the phone breathlessly, he said, “*Hello.*”

The voice at the other end said, “*Yes sir. I’m happy to tell you that for only 75 cents per week you can receive a one year subscription to Sports Illustrated.*” ... .. What a let down for the coach. ... This is what pride does to a person. ... Our pride can create expectations that will not become a reality. ... When our expectations go unfulfilled and we get back to earth... we are greatly disappointed.

How we handle our expectations will determine how we handle life itself and how life handles us. ... If we put all our expectations in people... we make them a prisoner of our expectations. ... If they do not come through for us when we expect them... then we become bitter... disappointed or depressed... and they become angry with us... because of the way we are responding to them.

Are all expectations wrong? ... No. ... God expects us to live and behave a certain way. He expects us to obey His commands and do what is right. ... Our parents expect us to obey and do what is right too. ... A husband or wife expects their spouse to love them and be faithful. ... These are realistic expectations. ... God also expects us to hope or trust in Him.

Our Lord can meet the great expectations of our hearts if He so desires when we trust in Him by faith. ... He wants us to live by faith. He wants us

to trust Him for great things. This is what we find in the two healings of our passage. But before we get there... let me ask you something.

What did you expect when you became a Christian? ... I'm sure Bishop Ridley (the courageous Bible translator of the sixteenth century) did not expect to be burned at the stake. ... Dietrich Bonhoeffer (German martyr under the Nazis)... did not expect to be hanged at age thirty-nine because of his unswerving faith in Jesus Christ. ... Alexander Solzhenitsyn did not expect... when he was confirmed in the faith... to spend years in prison because of his beliefs. ... . Nevertheless... I am sure we all **did** have certain expectations when we became Christians.

With these two healings in our verses today... Luke is outlining a radical Christianity. ... “Radical” and yet it is so “root” (or basic) Christianity. The reason it seems radical... is that Luke sets out to shatter so many of our false expectations about our Christian faith. ... We open a section today that will continue through four more chapters of this Gospel. Luke gives us a series of incidents (from here... until Luke 9:50) which suggest that Jesus did not measure up to the expectations of the Jews in at least four areas: He performed the wrong kinds of healings... He preached the wrong theology... He kept the wrong company... and He had the wrong attitude. ... [ P A U S E ] ...

It may not be out-of-the-question to think that you and I might have some needed correcting of our expectations about Christ and His leading. ... We should expect great things from God – but never to box Him in... to our own ideas of what is appropriate for Him. He has His Own authority – which often surprises us.

(You might say)... “*I **know** that He has sovereign authority...*” (So let me ask) Have you **always** known this? ... Have you ever thought that it would be unfair for God to send anyone to Hell...? ... Have you ever been dismayed by what appears to be a delay to answered prayer...? Have you ever asked: “*Why, God – why?*” ... .. Sometimes our expectations of God are improper. We box Him in by our expectations. ... .. We need to expect big things from God – but never place great authority on our own Pharisaical thoughts... of what should... or shouldn't be.

In the section of Luke's Gospel that we begin today... we will see several passages that arouse controversies about Jesus' miracles... His teaching... and His claims. ... Luke arranged these reports so that we would not only marvel at His power... but mostly at Jesus' **authority**.

### **Luke 5:12-26**

In the first incident... Jesus healed the leper. ... For the Jews... this was the wrong kind of healing because lepers were outcasts. ... It was believed at that time that those who were ill had sinned in some specific way. (They deserved their disease.) If you were a leper - your sins were great. You do **not** deserve anyone's mercy... and you were especially to be avoided. We don't believe that NOW... but can you see how it was understood to be the point of the Old Testament stories about Moses' sister Miriam (who challenged his authority)... Gehazi (who lied to Elisha so he could steal the wonderful riches that Elisha refused... and Uzziah (the 10<sup>th</sup> King of Judah who led God's people into terrible apostasy) ? ... God struck all these with leprosy... because of their great sin.

By Jesus' time... Jews were certain that lepers were all under divine punishment. But not only that... rabbinical teaching... with its minute strictures... had made matters even worse. ... If a leper even stuck his head inside a house... the house was pronounced unclean. ... It was illegal to greet a leper. ... Lepers had to remain at least 100 cubits away if they were upwind... and four cubits if downwind. ... Josephus (the Jewish historian) summed it up by saying that lepers were treated “*as if they were, in effect, dead men*”—dead men walking. They were required to announce their presence by yelling “Unclean!” when encountering non-lepers.

In addition to coping with horrible and probably terminal illness... they were utterly isolated from normal social contact.

So... those who watched Jesus were horrified. This was the wrong kind of healing because lepers were outcasts. (And) not only was it the wrong person to heal... but Jesus used the wrong method to accomplish it... (according to Jewish standards.) ... Jesus physically touched the leper – when it didn't seem that He had to. He merely spoke a word to heal others. Once... Jesus even healed someone who wasn't nearby. ... The boy was a few miles away at home dying.

In the second healing of our passage... (the healing of the paralytic that was brought to Him by his four persistent friends)... Jesus demonstrated (what was seen to be) the wrong theology... and He seemed to have the wrong attitude. Jesus (it appears) purposely picks a fight with the scribes and pharisees... who had come to find fault with Jesus. (“Bring it on!...”)  
Before Jesus healed the man... Jesus told him that his sins were forgiven. ... Of course the religious leaders would go nuts! Only God has authority to forgive sin.

Do you see why I said: “*Luke wants us to marvel at His power... but mostly at Jesus’ authority” ...? ... Let’s (now) take a closer look... and also examine this idea of having the right expectation.*

### **Luke 5:12**

Luke does not tell how this leper was able to get close to Jesus. ... As I said... according to the Law... a leper was required to stay far away from non-leprous people. ... Maybe he yelled the required “unclean!” and the crowd surrounding Jesus quickly backed away – like the parting of the Red Sea. That certainly explain the way Luke wrote about it.

Luke’s introduction of the man into the narrative is striking: “*And, behold a man.*” There is no verb. The man suddenly appeared like a ghost. The next moment... he was on his face at Jesus’ feet.

Throughout his Gospel... Luke makes it clear that Jesus was the Friend of the outcast... and they could come to Him for help. ... The man humbled himself before the Lord... and asked for mercy. The isolated man had to know that Jesus could reverse his condition and cleanse him. Whatever hope that he might have about a return to normal life... was wrapped up in Jesus’ power. ... Such great emotion underlies the passage. Each of us should sense the dramatic tension (here.)

**His** was a terrible case. Dr. Luke notes that he was “*full of leprosy.*” ... Luke (the physician) gives the exact condition of this leper. “*Full*” means the leprosy was advanced to cover the entire body and the end of life was near. ... **It was a condition in which God especially delights to work.** God often allows conditions to become very desperate before He steps in to remedy it in order to show His great power. ... (But let’s face it...)

Sometimes... when circumstances seem very dramatic (or very dire) our expectation that God will work... is totally absent... or greatly diminished. But let me say again - **It was a condition in which God especially delights to work.** ... [ P A U S E ] ...

The humility of the man is evident: he bows before Jesus as someone would to any superior in this culture. ... ἔδεήθη (*edeēthē*, he implored) describes the tone of his request. ... It is often used of prayer and suggests an urgent request. ... The address (Lord) is more than polite address. It reflects a recognition that Jesus has the capability to deal with the problem. ... Jesus is addressed with respect.

Now notice what he asks of Jesus. He did NOT say: “*Lord... if You are willing You can HEAL me...*” He saw that his condition was deeper than that. He was unclean. So he said to Jesus: “*Lord if You are willing You can make me clean...*” (You can purify me... spiritually.)

This word “**clean**” is a strong word in the Greek. ... ***Katharizo*** has the idea of purity. ... He had absolute confidence in the ability of Jesus Christ to cure him physically and also spiritually.

This man truly believed there was nothing within him that was commendable to God. And THIS is the perfect posture to receive grace.

God does not come to the self-sufficient... those who think they have no need or imagine they can make it on their own. ... He comes to the empty in spirit... those who mourn their condition. If you would come to Christ... this is the way you must come — saying: *Unclean!* ... In fact... if you come saying: “*Only partly unclean*” or “*I’m not as bad as most people*” ... “*I’m 75 percent clean*” ... or ... “*I’m 10 percent clean*” ... Christ will not

receive you. This is the great tragedy of the comfortable today — we cannot accept that we are not acceptable. ... That is why the gospel is such an offense! Sin controls people through two opposing lies. The first is... we are not sinners—nothing is wrong with us. The second is... we are sinners... but we are so bad that we are beyond help. ... I sincerely hope that no one who is listening to me... has any of these wrongful expectations.

The leper did not doubt the ability of Jesus to help him. ... Look at what he said: *“If You are willing You can make me clean...”* His only reservation seemed to be Jesus’ willingness.

### **Luke 5:13**

Jesus responded at once. He did something most wonderfully kind - He **touched** him! ... Everyone who witnessed this must have loudly gasped with astonishment. *“He touched him!”*

Jesus was not only willing - He did the **unthinkable**. ... Jesus answers the question with a loving touch. ... He chose to touch the leper’s diseased skin... as if to say: *“Your disease doesn’t prevent Me from accepting you.”* ... The leprous man is not sent away... nor is he warned about coming near to Jesus. ...Instead... he hears and feels Jesus’ tender willingness.

Jesus’ **word** would have been sufficient... but His touch confirmed His care. Jesus touched the man... despite the taboo that said such an act would render Him unclean.

### **Luke 5:14**

Why did Jesus command him not to tell anyone? ... We might expect Jesus to tell the man to go out and tell EVERYBODY about Jesus. ... Out of the many reasons commentators give... I will highlight two.

**(a)** The man was to go immediately to the priest to be a testimony that the prophesied age of the Messiah was here. When the priests hear that it was Jesus who had so completely and instantly cured this man... they will have received an irrefutable testimony of this.

There were so few deliverances from leprosy. Some Bible commentators allege – probably not since Miriam (Moses' sister) was healed. This man going to the priests would certainly declare to the religious authorities that the Messianic age had come.

**(b)** The second reason Jesus probably did not want the man to tell anyone... was Jesus was trying to stem the tide of people who were besieging Him to see Him perform miracles – as if the circus came to town. (Much of the enthusiasm was unhealthy.)

Did he and others remain silent... as Jesus had ordered? ... The answer is hinted at... in verses 15 and 16... But Mark tells us plainly. (Let's look at both.)

### **Luke 5:15-16**

#### **Mark 1:45 (ESV)**

*<sup>45</sup> But he went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in desolate places, and people were coming to him from every quarter.*

Jesus told the healed man to keep quiet. In spite of His instructions... the news of His power spread throughout the entire region. ... Huge crowds

came to hear Him preach and also be healed of their illnesses. ... This kind of crowd lacked character. ... This crowd only wanted to see something sensational. ... It wanted healing physically but not spiritually. ... It was not interested in Christ's teaching... which was needed more than the miracles.

The leprous man may have seemed to be doing something good in telling others about the Lord. ... In reality (though) he was disobeying the Lord's command.

It is never right to do wrong - in order to do right. ... In this situation... he did wrong by not going to the priests first. ... This is what the Lord specifically instructed him to do. ... It is a reminder that we need to obey God's commands and do what He says. ... This is what makes a follower of Christ a true success.

(And while I am on the subject of "success"... ) Jesus withdrew Himself into the wilderness to pray. The word "withdrew" is in the imperfect tense which means He frequently (or continually) did this in His daily life. People don't realize that your walk with God (your time alone with Him)... will determine whether you make wise or foolish choices. It will play a huge role in whether you are a success or a failure in your Christian life.

Every Christian needs to withdraw himself/herself from the hustle and bustle of the affairs of this life and get alone with God in prayer and time in His Word. If you feel you don't have time to do this... then you are foolishly thinking that you are more capable than Christ. ... Make time. Make time for the Lord. The strength you receive from Him today may help you to endure life's trials tomorrow.

Jesus was headed for a series of conflicts in the events that we will see followed in Luke's Gospel. So Luke would have you and I notice that before Jesus faced great challenges... He was spending time with the Father. One of those challenges is what we read about in the next verses.

### **Luke 5:17**

Luke informs us that in this crowd there were Scribes (which Luke calls "teachers of the Law") and Pharisees. They had come to assess Jesus... from every small town in Galilee... towns in Judea... and Jerusalem (itself.) This was a coordinated evaluation... a broad-based investigative committee... united in its eagerness to find something wrong with the young "upstart rabbi from Galilee." ... This is Luke's first mention of the Pharisees' observing Jesus' ministry. ... The officials of organized Judaism are starting to take an interest in Jesus.

### **Luke 5:18-19**

Imagine what was going on in the house as the sounds of shoveling could be heard... and then debris and dust began to fall to the floor where Jesus was standing. ... The focus of attention of everyone (including Jesus)... would be directed to the ceiling. I'm sure they were all looking up and paying attention to what was happening. Many of them would be squirming and coughing... and registering disgust. And then they probably heard: "*Look out below!*" Then all of the sudden... a stretcher appeared through the roof... on which a man was layed and was being lowered to the floor.

It must have been quite a site. Above... the light streaming past them in dusty beams... were four sweaty... determined faces. ... Below... was the special investigative committee... all decked-out in their most impressive

robes and pontifical hats... which was now covered with dirt and debris. ... But the four friends probably didn't care about THAT... or the vandalism they had caused to the house. These men were determined to get their friend to Jesus. They cared about him ... and they had great expectations in the Lord to heal their friend.

Wow! How those four must have loved him! Their love overcame daunting obstacles and circumstances. They had a love for their friend and a faith in Jesus... that would not be put off by anything! ... None of them said: "*The crowd is too big. I guess this isn't the Lord's will.*" ... Instead... they started climbing! ... A wavering faith would have opted out when they began digging up the roof (if not sooner.) ... "*Ah, man, this is embarrassing. You'll have to finish without me.*" But none of that kind of thinking prevailed. Their love and faith persisted. (This is what a steadfast / unshakeable love and faith look like.)

What about YOUR persistence...? Have you given up on any of your friends or family members in bringing them to Jesus... because you've encountered obstacles... or embarrassment? ... Does your love and faith persist...?

Inconvenience and sacrifice are two key reasons why many Christians do not accomplish anything for the Lord... or get involved in the ministry of the church. They are not willing to pay the price. ... .. These men were expecting the fulfillment of their great expectations... because of their love and irrefutable faith in God's ability to heal their paralyzed friend. They had absolute confidence that God would meet his need. They were men of love and faith. ... They didn't quit. They didn't give up!

What keeps us from seeing our expectations fulfilled...?

### **Luke 5:20-21**

Knowing that the religious officials were looking for something to pin on Him... He gave it to them (or so they thought.) ... Verse 20 reads that when Jesus saw their faith... He said: '*Man, your sins are forgiven*' "

Jesus was claiming to be equal with God... and this was a calculatedly provocative way to make that claim! ... .. When Jesus said: "*Your sins are forgiven*"... the Committee member's antennas popped up. "*What? Who does this guy think he is? How dare he speak blasphemy! Only God can forgive a person of their sins....*" And they were absolutely right! They got the point. They completely understood Jesus' claim... but they refused to believe its truth.

The ones that were suffering from paralysis were the Scribes and Pharisees... not the man on the cot. ... They were paralyzed by their critical spirit... lack of love... and unbelief. ... The Pharisees were spiritually crippled. ... .. So Jesus (very ingeniously) offered them irrefutable proof. ... Their theological objections would have been compelling if He were not God. ... So Jesus addressed their concerns directly with an intriguing... sophisticated logic.

### **Luke 5:22-23**

The logic of the question is easy to follow: it is easier to say something that cannot be visually verified... than to say something that can be visually substantiated. ... The easier claim (from the observer's point of view) is the claim to forgive sins... since one cannot prove it wrong! ... The issue is

this: Is Jesus' claim an empty word... or the real thing? ... Does Jesus' declaration of forgiveness have God's word and power behind it?

### **Luke 5:24-26**

The proof of the Deity of Christ was in the healing of the man. It was obvious and irrefutable proof... because it was done right before the critics' eyes. ... The critics (of course)... did not believe. ... Their problem was not a lack of evidence but a lack of faith.

(Oh! I hope that you hear me on this! This is so important!)... Unbelief likes to hide under the guise of lack of evidence... but the unbelief of the critics (in Jesus' day... and in our own)... is actually just a rebellious unbelief ... (a choice not to believe - regardless of the facts.)

... [ P A U S E ] ...

We might have an easy time recognizing this... as true... for the unbeliever. ... But what about it being true for a Christian...? ... If we don't take the time to spend time alone with God... so that we might develop the right expectations – which will result in a persistent love and faith – isn't that also just a rebellious unbelief...? ... [ P A U S E ] ...

A childhood accident caused poet Elizabeth Barrett to lead a life of semi-invalidism... before she married Robert Browning in 1846. ... In her youth... Elizabeth had been watched over by her tyrannical father. ... When she and Robert were married... their wedding was held in secret... because of her father's disapproval.

After the wedding... the Brownings sailed for Italy... where they lived for the rest of their lives. ... But even though her parents had disowned her...

Elizabeth never gave up on the relationship. ... Almost weekly she wrote them letters. ... But not once... did they reply.

After 10 years... she received a large box in the mail. ... Inside... Elizabeth found all of her letters; not one had been opened! ... Today those letters are among the most beautiful in classical English literature. Had her parents only read a few of them... their relationship with Elizabeth might have been restored.

If people would only take time to read the Bible... they could realize how much the Lord loves them... and loves to work in IMPOSSIBLE circumstances. ... They would have expectations that are a closer match with the Lord's... which result in persistent love and faith.