**Grace to You** :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

**Only God Forgives Sin, Part 2**
Scripture: Luke 5:21-26
Code: 42-66

We, of course, look at the cross and remember that Jesus provided for us the forgiveness of sins. And that is precisely the subject of our study in Luke chapter 5, so let's go back to Luke chapter 5 this morning as we continue to look at verses 17 through 26...Luke 5:17 through 26. It's our third and final message in this wonderful account that we've called "Jesus' power to forgive sin." Before we look specifically at the text, I want to remind you about another text of Scripture.

Everybody who knows the New Testament and the gospels, loves the parables of Jesus. They're graphic ways to express spiritual truth and we all have our favorites. One of my favorite parables is a parable in Matthew chapter 18. Jesus said, the Kingdom of heaven is like a king who called in his servants to give an account for how they had managed his money. And one servant came in and was confronted and it was discovered that this particular servant owed the king ten thousand talents. You remember the story. Ten thousand talents is really a massive fortune. Ten thousand talents at the time of the New Testament would be equal to seventeen years' wages for ten thousand men. To put that in perspective, records from the first century indicate that the total annual revenue collected by the Roman government from Israel averaged about 900 talents. Ten thousand talents was an absolutely massive debt, unpayable. And going back into the Old Testament, 1 Chronicles 29, you have the building of Solomon's amazing temple which was overlaid with gold which amounted to eight thousand talents. So ten thousand was a massive amount. And it may not be just an exact amount because the word "ten thousand," murion in the Greek is the largest number expressible in the Greek language. And, for example, in 1 Corinthians 4:15 it's translated "countless." So the point is the man owed a countless debt, he owed a debt that was so vast it couldn't be counted and he had no way to pay it, absolutely no way to pay it.

So he pled with the king, you remember the parable. He pled with the king and the king was merciful and compassionate, it says, and forgave him the whole debt. It's an amazing story. It's a story of embezzlement. It's a story of extravagant indulgence, how do you...first of all, embezzle that amount and then how do you have none of it left to pay back? The malfeasance of that kind of activity is really massive. The indulgence is extravagant and therefore the forgiveness is equally extravagant.

But that's what God does. God is that king and you are that servant and so am I. And when we fall on our face and tell the Lord we don't really have any capability of paying, in His compassion He forgives us. That is the most important element of God's nature to us as sinners because we need forgiveness more than we need anything else. This then is the heart of the Christian message. This

is the heart of the gospel.  And here in Luke chapter 5 we're seeing Jesus, God in human flesh doing what God does, forgiving an unpayable debt.

Now as we learned in our last couple of studies, only God can forgive sin.  Only God can remove the sinner from eternal damnation to eternal glory.  Only God can remove the indictment, remove the guilt and remove the consequence of sin because only God is the lawgiver, only God is the holy standard, only God is the judge, only God is the executioner.  And only God can determine a means whereby He can forgive.  Only God can forgive sin.

Happily for us it is His desire to do that.  It is His nature to do that.  He is by nature a forgiver.  He is gracious.  He is, as we read in the Psalm this morning, merciful.  So when Jesus, God in human flesh, Emmanuel, God with us, the Son of God, the incarnate God, appears in the world, we will expect Him to do what God does and that's exactly what He does here, He forgives sin.

You remember the story, look back at verse 17.  It was one day, we know from the other gospel writers Matthew and Mark who include the story as well, it was one day in the city of Capernaum in a house, probably a fairly large house to absorb the huge crowd that gathered wherever Jesus went.  And in the crowd were some Pharisees and teachers of the law.  They were the religious legalists in Israel and this was a sort of, I guess, a formal gathering since they had come from every village of Galilee, Judea and even down in Jerusalem where they were headquartered.  And they were all coming, gathering together, to assess this Jesus about whom they had heard so much.  And the power of the Lord was present for Him to perform healing.

And behold, some men were carrying on a bed a man who was paralyzed.  They were trying to bring him in and set him down in front of Him.  They had come all the way from their village, carrying this man on a pallet, a stretcher.  He was paralyzed, quadriplegic, paraplegic,  whatever it was, he was unable to walk, unable to move himself.  And so his friends carried him this long distance in that fashion.  When they got there, of course, the crowd was huge, they couldn't get him in.  Nobody made a way for him.  They couldn't get him up to where Jesus was and so frustrated for a moment they determined there was a better way.  Verse 19, not finding any way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof.  There was always an outside staircase to a roof patio in those one-story houses in Israel.  And they just went up to the roof.  They determined exactly where Jesus was below them and they removed the tiles in the roof and dropped the man, verse 19 says, right in the center in front of Jesus.  No doubt a dramatic entrance, somewhat startling the crowd.  That was the context for this amazing revelation of Jesus Christ as God the Forgiver.

Then the claim comes in verse 20.  There's no record in any of the gospels that there was any conversation, no record that the men said anything who brought him, no record that the paralyzed man said anything.  Everything seemed to be rather apparent.  It would be apparent that they had done this to get the man physical healing, but Jesus knew better.  He knew what the man really

wanted. He knew what was in his heart. And seeing their faith, including the faith of the man, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven you." And as I pointed out, what He saw in that man was faith and repentance. He saw that the Spirit of God had done a work in that man's heart so that he had deep regret over his sin. He had that broken and contrite spirit and desired to be forgiven and made right with God. Jesus knew that man's heart because Jesus knows all hearts. He knew what was in the heart of that man. He forgave him immediately. He forgave him. He justified him. He regenerated him. He converted him. He sanctified him with those words, that man's sins literally were obliterated from his account. They were wiped off the divine books. At that moment, Jesus on His own personal authority absolved that man of all the guilt of all his sins forever. An amazing thing...amazing. In fact, that claim, the claim to be able to forgive sin, literally stunned the scribes and the Pharisees. It shocked them. It rattled them to the core of their being.

In verse 21 we come to the confrontation that ensued immediately and it starts out, first of all, mentally. And the scribes and Pharisees began to reason, and this is simply their thought process. And in their minds collectively they're all thinking the same thing, "Who is this man who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" They had, I might say, sound theology, only God can forgive sins, they knew that. That was correct. And for anyone but God to forgive someone's sins, not like we would forgive someone who did an offense against us, but literally to obliterate the record of a man's sins before God, to absolve a man, for a man to do that is the most outrageous blasphemy possible, as I pointed out to you last time. This is to usurp the role of God. This is to act as if you are God. This is the supreme act of blasphemous idolatry where you literally put yourself in the place of God. In their minds Jesus might as well have said, "I am the creator of the universe, I am the almighty God, I am Yahweh, I am the eternal judge." This is blasphemy. And when they said, "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" they were not asking a question for which they needed an answer, that was a rhetorical comment, they knew the answer. It was the thought of incredulity, who can do this but God alone? This is not God, therefore this is blasphemy.

Now this introduces us to a very important consideration when you're talking about Jesus. There are a lot of people who want to patronize Jesus by saying He was a good man, a religious man, an old man, a good prophet, a man of ethics, a man of integrity. He was a man of kindness, a man of goodness. He was a man who represented God and all of that kind of patronizing language. But the fact of the matter is, Jesus is either God or He is the ultimate blasphemer. He's either God or the ultimate blasphemer and there's nothing in the middle.

Now because they were self-righteous and didn't know God, because they were void of salvation, because they were void of grace, because they were void of truth, because they were blind to reality, they concluded the wrong thing. They might have said, "He must be God, He just forgave sin." But they didn't. They said, "He's not God, He just blasphemed." And immediately their minds began to process back to the book of Leviticus where the prescription was given that a blasphemer was to be stoned to death. Already the leaders of Israel, before you even get to this account, had been thinking

about how to get rid of Jesus and I'm quite sure they all showed up that day in Capernaum to somehow strengthen their case for killing Jesus and it just escalates and escalates and escalates. We'll see that as we go through Luke. If you just take a glance at chapter 6 and verse 11, these same Pharisees and scribes are filled with rage and discussing together what they might do to Jesus. I mean, this plot just keeps escalating and escalating until finally they effect His execution by the Romans on a cross.

He was a man and that's all they were ever going to allow Him to be. They were blinded by the god of this world who blinds the minds of those who believe not. They were blinded by their won self-righteousness, they were blinded by their own ceremonial religion. They were nothing but, Jesus said later, whited sepulchers, on the outside they looked white and clean, on the inside they were stinking with dead-man's bones.

Now when they're thinking this, Jesus knows their thoughts. They're thinking, "What a blasphemer this man is. He thinks to do what only God can do." Now if He was merely a man, if He was only a man, and it was made known to Him what they were thinking, if He was a good man and not fake and a charlatan and con man and a huckster and fraud and a false prophet, if He was a good man, if He was a religious man, a moral man, an ethical man, a man of integrity and even a godly man, if He was standing in relationship to God like all other good men, religious men, believing men, all other saints, prophets and teachers, if He had nothing more to do with God's forgiveness than all other preachers do and that is to tell people God will forgive them, then He immediately should have said, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, you misunderstood me. I'm not saying I can forgive the man, I simply meant to say that God will forgive the man." If He was a good man, if He was a noble man, if He was a godly man, then He would need to hurry and correct the misconception and say, "Wait a minute, I can't forgive sin, I'm sorry you misunderstood what I intended to communicate. I need to set the record straight, I agree, only God can forgive sin, I'm just here to announce that God can do that and will do that if you believe and repent." But He didn't say that.

There was no verbal testimony from the man about his repentance. There was no statement of contrition. There was no confession of sin. There was no affirmation of faith in God. There was no verbal cry for mercy. There didn't need to be, Jesus could see the man. He could see his heart. He knew exactly what he was thinking, exactly what he was feeling and exactly what he desired and what he wanted and what he wanted far more than a physical healing was the forgiveness of his sins and the hope of eternal life. And Jesus knew that and Jesus as God had the right to give it and He gave it. I am a human mediator of the message of forgiveness. I can't forgive a man and wipe his sins clean. No man can do that. No priest can do that. Nobody can do that but God alone. And anybody who usurps that is either God, or a blasphemer.

But Jesus did not respond in a fashion that indicated that they had misunderstood Him. He did not double back and say, "Whoa, whoa, I'm sorry, you misunderstood me." He doesn't do that at all.

They were right.  They were exactly right.  Only God can forgive sin and any man who says he can is a blasphemer and Jesus didn't correct their thoughts.  They had the right thoughts.  They had the right theology.  He knew exactly what they were thinking.  That's another indication that He was God.  Jeremiah 17:10 God says, "I, the Lord, search the heart."  Ezekiel 11:5, "For I know the things that come into your mind, every one of them," says God.  And here Jesus as God knows as well.  John 2:25 it says Jesus knew what was in the heart of man so that nobody needed to tell Him what they were thinking.

Jesus unmasking their silent thoughts and heightening the confrontation speaks to them in verse 23...or verse 22, "But Jesus aware of their reasonings answered and said to them, 'Why are you reasoning in your hearts?'" And I'm sure there was a little more than just that simple statement.  "Why are you thinking the way you are thinking," and He may have even revealed to them what they were thinking.  "Why are you thinking the way you are thinking?  Why are you thinking I'm a blasphemer? Why are you thinking how you can kill Me as a usurper of the glory of God?  Why?"  And then He replies again to their thoughts.  Verse 23, "Which is easier to say, your sins have been forgiven you or to say arise and walk?"

First of all, in verse 22 He questions their motives.  Why are you thinking like this?  Why are you thinking...why are you full of such hate?  Why are you full of such darkness?  Why are you full of such rejection?  Why are you concluding that I'm a blasphemer and not God?

They already knew about Him.  He had cleansed the temple in Jerusalem when He started His ministry.  He had been in the Judean part of Israel, the southern part around Jerusalem for about a year.  He had been in Galilee ministering.  There was plenty of information, people were being healed all over the place.  There was plenty of information about Him.  His message was very widespread about bringing the gospel and forgiveness and all of that.  There was plenty of evidence about who He was.  And He says to them, "Why do you continue in your mind to reject this truth?  Why do you go immediately to blasphemy and death?"

Let me confront it a little more deeply...He adds in verse 23.  "Which is easier to say...?"  He asks them a question.  "Which is easier to say, your sins have been forgiven you?  Or to say, rise and walk?"  You know the answer to that?  That's a good question.  That's a provocative question.  Which is easier to say?  Your sins are forgiven?  Or, rise up and walk?  Not easier to do, easier to say.

Before I answer that, let me talk about that connection.  For...for man, any man, you, me or anybody else, both are impossible.  Here's a paralytic, here's a man who let's say is a quadriplegic, he's a paraplegic, he's immobile.  For how long?  I don't know.  He is paralyzed.  His muscles are all atrophied.  His bones are brittle.  His brain has forgotten how to move his limbs and were he given the ability to move, his brain wouldn't know what to tell his legs what to do, as we know when somebody's been in a condition like this.  They have to learn all over again how to walk.  His muscles

have atrophied and I've seen them, the ?????  ????, so have you of people who have no ability to move their limbs and I've seen how they dwindle away to virtually skin and bones and sinew.  This is the man.  Who has the power to say to this man, "Rise up and walk?"  Who has the power to say that?  No man does.  No man can immediately recreate that man, eliminate his paralysis and the cause of that paralysis, give him all brand new muscles, brand new bones and put in his brain a new memory about how to walk.  No man can do that.  Neither can any man forgive his sins.  The two are connected.  It's very important.  For a man, both are impossible, but for God, would you agree, both are possible?  God alone can forgive sins, the Jews would agree that...agree to that.  And God alone can create, He is the creator and if He needs to create new limbs, new bones, new muscles and a new memory, He can do that.  So these two things are only possible to God and not to man.

And by the way, I need to dig a little deeper into this, and they are inseparable.  They really are inseparable.  Sin and sickness are inseparable because they're both in the plan of salvation.  If you go back to Matthew 8:16 and 17, the Bible tells us that in the sacrifice of Christ, in the atonement, is not only the salvation of our souls, but the healing of our bodies ultimately.  When you put your faith in Jesus Christ your soul is saved, and Romans 8 says you're waiting for the redemption of your....your body.  But in the end, we'll have new souls, new spirits and new glorified bodies.  So ultimately God has to deal with the sin that's in our soul and the infirmity as a result of that sin that's in our body.  God alone can do that.  God alone can deal with sin, the root cause, and sickness and death, the effect of that cause.  And whoever is God has to be able to do both.

If this is the Messiah God, the Son of God, God incarnate who brings the eternal kingdom of heaven, where there is no sin and no sickness and no death, then He has to be able not only to forgive sin, but to remove all its consequences in the physical realm.  When Jesus came into the world and healed people, He was making a very, very important statement.  He came forgiving sin, that's dealing with the cause, and He came healing sickness showing that He can also deal with the symptoms.  And our final story, you know the final story on your life, the final story on my life and the life of all believers demands that the Lord be able to overpower both, right?  When we go to heaven, there's no sin and there's no sickness and there's no death.  What good would it do...what good would it do if Jesus could put away sickness, if He could put away disease, if He could put away death, He could overpower sickness, overpower illnesses, overpower disease, overpower paralysis and even bring people back from the dead, but He couldn't forgive sin?  Well then all the others would just keep appearing and appearing and appearing and appearing and appearing and He'd have to keep dealing with them and dealing with them and dealing with them.  And there never would be heaven.  And there never would be a sinless paradise.  There never would be an eternal kingdom of holiness and righteousness.  So God in His salvation plan will deal with sin, does deal with sin and ultimately all its symptoms in the physical realm.  We get new spirits, new souls free from sin, new bodies free from disease and death, that's our future.

Jesus as God could deal with both. He could deal with both. The two are absolutely inseparable. Healing and forgiveness go together. They are works of God and God alone. Removing sickness and removing sin, sin being the cause and sickness being one of the symptoms. Jesus said He came to take care of both. So they go together.

Now let's go back to the question. Only God can do this, not man, only God. So Jesus says, "Which is easier to say, your sins have been forgiven you, or to say rise and walk?" And He's kind of picking at their thought process. "How dare Him say forgive...your sins are forgiven, how dare He say that He is God. How dare He blaspheme like that."

So He says to them, "Which is easier to say, your sins have been forgiven or to say rise and walk?" The answer is, it's easier to say your sins are forgiven. It's not easier to do it, both are...what?...impossible to man and possible to God. That isn't the question. The question is which is easier to say and that's easy...it's easier to say your sins are forgiven. It's easy to say that because you can't see if it happened, right? I mean, Jesus said to the man, "Your sins are forgiven." Well that was a divine transaction. That occurred in the mind of God. That occurred in the councils of the trinity. That's not visible. He didn't all of a sudden get a permanent halo that marked him. There was no evidence. There was no experimental way to determine whether or not his sins had been forgiven. That's all in the council of God. So Jesus says you're questioning whether I can forgive that man's sin, aren't you? And you think it's real easy to say, "Your sins are forgiven." In fact, you think I'm saying it as a blasphemer and I've overstepped the bounds that any man should ever, every come near. So let me do this for you. Verse 24, "But in order that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...He said to the paralytic...I say to you, rise and take up your stretcher and go home."

Now remember, man can do neither, God can do both. They don't believe He's God and they believe that saying to that man "Your sins are forgiven" is blasphemous because He's not God, and saying it doesn't prove it happened, but if Jesus can heal the man which only God can do, then verse 24 says, "You will know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins."

You see, it's not easy to say to somebody, "Arise, take up your bed and walk." If they don't do it, fphhhhh right? You immediately reveal that you're a fake. You're human. But in order that you may know. It's really impossible to say you are healed convincingly if you can't do it. So to prove that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...whoa...what a statement. This is the heart of the confrontation to prove that this Son of Man...you know where He got that title? Daniel 7, "The throne of God...verses 9 and 10...and there with God and His throne...verses 13 and 14...is the Son of Man." That is a preincarnate prophecy of the Messiah who would become a man. The Son of Man is in Daniel 7:13 and 14, standing before the throne of God, ready to take His Kingdom. When Jesus calls Himself Son of Man it's His own title for Himself. And yes, it is an expression of His humanity. That was a...that was sort of a common idiom. James and John were kind of bombastic, kind of

obstreperous guys and they were called sons of thunder, remember that? And we who are sinful are called sons of wickedness, an expression that's used in 2 Samuel chapter 3. And that's one way to express that that's something of our nature. And it is true that Son of Man does speak of Jesus as human, but more than that, it is an expression of the promise of God through Daniel of the Messiah, the One who would have a Kingdom and who would reign and who was there on the throne with God Himself. So Jesus says you need to know that the Son of God has authority on earth to forgive sins, and so that I can prove that I can do what you can't see, I'm going to do what only God can do that you can see. So He said to the man, "I say to you, rise, take up your stretcher and go home." Three commands...rise, take up and go. At this point it's becoming very clear whether or not Jesus can forgive sin, because only God can heal and only God can forgive sin.

Now, just think about it again. Here is this man who is paralyzed, has been paralyzed, atrophied, forgotten how to walk. To say you're healed and to say now you have to go immediately into two years of rehabilitation, might have been a more reasonable approach, but to say to the man, "Get up, take your stuff, put it under your arm and go home," don't take two steps with a walker, go home. You're talking about a creative miracle here. I always kind of wonder why the people on TV at Benny Hinn's meetings when they get healed fall over. In Luke chapter 5 Jesus healed this man, told him to get up and go home.

Well, just to take the controversy to a fever pitch, we come to the consequences in verse 25. From the context, the claim, the confrontation, we've moved now to the consequence in verse 25. "And at once he rose up before them, took up what he had been lying on, and went home." Did exactly what Jesus told him to do. All of his...all of his bones hardened perfectly, all of his muscles were created right there on the spot by the Lord. All the hinges in his joints worked perfectly. All that dried up and atrophied sinews, all the elements of the physiology of that man were immediately recreated, brand new. His brain went into full function. His arms went into full function so that he could carry what he was...what he was prior lying on and he just went home. We don't know how far home was, but he took and it must have been a wonderful walk. That's one of the things you see in the healings of Jesus is that they were instant...instant, total healings, no rehab. The Creator is creating. He creates new human parts.

Now unlike the leper, there was no fear of contagion of this man's problem, this paralysis and so there was no reentry ceremony, such as a leper had to go through as we saw in the earlier story. He didn't have to go to the temple and make a sacrifice and show himself to the priests so that he could be examined and declared clean so that he wouldn't spread the disease. He just said go home, and he did exactly what Jesus said. The last part of verse 25 says he went home glorifying God. The Bible, of course, sometimes understates things, doesn't it? Glorifying God. I mean, you could go on for paragraphs describing this guy was probably jumping and leaping and dancing and praising and singing hallelujah and could hardly stand it until he could get to the house and walk in the door...ta-da...you know, and everybody could see, you know, what had happened. But the best part of this

wasn't that he was walking home, the best part was that he was cleansed of sin. And I don't know what he expected when he started out that morning, I don't know what his four buddies expected, but I'm sure he didn't expect what he got. Glorifying God, glorifying God. It reminds me of the angels, that's what they were doing in heaven when they announced the birth of the Messiah.

He was filled with praise. Honoring God with thanks and joy. And you can be sure now he knew who Jesus was. He may not have had a full...fully defined Christology before this event but he had one now. He knew that he had just met God. His sins had been forgiven and he had been created new. You could just imagine him kind of feeling around his body and just being in shock over what had happened in the creative miracle that he had just experienced. And here he goes one way, glorifying God, and there go the Pharisees and the scribes the other way, full of anger, resentment, further down the satanic path of rejection, deeper and deeper into their own darkness, seeking to kill God, as it were.

Final response is noted in verse 26. "They were all seized with astonishment..." This is the crowd. You've got the man on one side who has just been regenerated both physically and spiritually. And you've got the Pharisees on the other side who have just plunged deeper into their resentment. And you've got the group in the middle, the crowd in the middle. And you're always going to see that. All the way through the story of Jesus you'll see the believers who are transformed. You'll see the angry hostile religious leaders whose hate is escalated by everything they experience. And then you'll see the mass in the middle that's sort of the mixed multitude, divided between sort of onlookers, sort of half-hearted disciples, and those who are becoming true disciples, sort of mixed in the mass in the middle. They were all seized, it says in verse 26, with astonishment. They were literally just shaken with it, seized with astonishment, with astonishment is ekstasis, ecstasy. They were ecstatic. This is a word for amazement. They were stunned. They were shocked by what they had just experienced.

There was absolutely no human explanation for it. And they too began glorifying God. "O God, what You have done today has to come from You". They had seen salvation. They had seen forgiveness. They had seen creation. And I'm sure many of them even in that crowd were temporary, like in John 6, there were many disciples who followed Jesus and when He said hard things, they left. Remember that? And walked no more with Him. And Jesus, remember, said to Peter, "Are you going to go away?" And he said, "To whom shall we go? You and You alone have the words of eternal life." There were in that multitude the mixture of people who were at different places in terms of their understanding and commitment to Christ. But for the moment, they were as they always are through the gospels, the crowds are literally shocked by His power. And they began glorifying God. As I said, for some it was temporary, perhaps and superficial. For others it was the real thing.

And then it says in verse 26, "And they were filled," this means literally overwhelmed, "with fear...with fear." What does that mean? What does it mean to be filled with fear? What were they fearful of?

Well, the word here phobos is the noun from which we get phobia, which is a fear. That word has three meanings and I need to explain them to you and then I'll tell you which one is always the one used in the scriptures, in the gospels and Acts.

There is, first of all, the fear we call panic. It is related to circumstance that invades our life. It's what you feel when the house starts to shake and everything starts to come off the wall. It's what I was watching the people experience on a flight out of LAX when we were about 300 feet off the ground and the right engine exploded and there was a big bang and all of a sudden the plane lurched and you're looking around and you're seeing panic. That's one way the word phobos can be used. It's a chilling kind of terror. It's a fright that comes about by a circumstance introduced into one's life.

The second way in which that word is used is to speak of a general sort of broad long-term apprehension, just anxiety, just that long-term anxiety kind of thing that some people just live generally with, afraid of this, afraid of that. And mostly it has to do with things that haven't happened.

But thirdly, there is that fear that we would call reverence. It is an understanding that God is holy. It is an understanding that God is mighty, that God is powerful, that God is active, that God is present. Never in the synoptics, Matthew, Mark, Luke, never in the book of Acts is this word used except to describe that kind of fear. It's always used of awe and reverence in the heart of a person confronted with divine presence and divine power. It's used of the reaction of the disciples when they saw Jesus walking on the water. It's used of their reaction when He stilled the storm. It's used of the reaction of the people after the raising of the son of the widow of Nain in Luke 7, after the healing of the demonic in Luke 8. It's used, remember back in chapter 1, of the feelings of Zacharias when he saw an angel standing beside the altar. It's used of the people who were stunned when they saw Zacharias the father of John the Baptist receive his speech back. It's used of the shepherds in the field when they heard the angels who came to tell them of the Messiah's birth. It's used of the guards who were shocked at the tomb of the Lord Jesus Christ when the stone was rolled away. It's used of the women who came to the tomb describing their fear, their awe, their reverence. It's even used of the church after the death of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts chapter 5. It's used of the heathen who were trying to be exorcists at Ephesus in the nineteenth chapter. I mean, it just appears in lots of places and it describes this sense that God is present, that God is moving and God is powerful.

And it's a necessary fear. It's a healthy fear. It's a very healthy fear. In fact, in some ways it's the power of a chaste life. You see, the awareness of God's presence, the awareness of God's holiness, the awareness of God's power is the source of great things. It's the source of holiness. Second Corinthians 7:1, "Perfecting holiness in the fear of God." It's connected with godly sorrow. Also in that 2 Corinthians chapter, further on down in verse 11 when he talks about repentance. It's the source of our...of our godly living, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." It's the basis of our mutual respect and our mutual service. We serve one another with fear, Ephesians 5:21

says, it's the motive for our evangelism, "Knowing the fear of God we persuade men." It just comes up everywhere. When somebody sins, 1 Timothy 5:20 says, we tell everybody if they won't repent in order that all may fear, even if it's an elder or a pastor in the church.

So, there was a certain fear. Matthew 9:8 adds a little note to this. Matthew 9 gives the same...gives an account of the same event. And in Matthew 9 it says, "The people said that they were stunned that God had given such authority to men, that God had given such authority to men." That's interesting. That tells me that not all the people believed Jesus was God. And remember now, the people didn't know what the Pharisees and scribes were thinking. What Jesus was saying and doing was interacting with their thoughts. And for some of the people, they were still assuming that God had given this power to men. Not good theology. And so that's why I say within the crowd, there's not a uniform commitment that Jesus is God. But what they had seen was stunning and it says at the end of verse 26, "We have seen remarkable things today."

And that's pretty much the way it goes. The crowd concludes that what they're seeing is amazing. What they're seeing is remarkable. In fact, the word used there is paradoxa. They've seen paradoxes, that is things that have no explanation, things which are humanly contradictory. You can't forgive sin and you can't get out of a stretcher in that condition and go home on your own two feet. This is paradox. But they didn't necessarily believe that Jesus was God. As I said, in that crowd in the middle there was all kinds of commitment and that's still how it is, isn't it? In the world you have those of us who are going home glorifying God because we've been forgiven, we know our healing is coming. And then there are those who hate God, hate Christ, and would do everything they could to stamp out every expression of the gospel, every representation of Jesus Christ. Then there's the mass in the middle who at one level or another are sort of amazed and wonder about Jesus.

Where are you? Only one place you want to be. That fickle crowd shows up later, doesn't it, in the life of Christ on one day asking if He would please take His throne as King and by Friday screaming for His blood. I don't know where you want to be, but I want to be going to my heavenly home glorifying God, don't you? Because my sins have been forgiven.

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