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Sermon Series: *Jesus: Provocateur, No. 5*

Perseverance

October 18, 2020

Luke 5:17-26 (NIV)

One day Jesus was teaching, and Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there. They had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal the sick. ¹⁸ Some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. ¹⁹ When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus.

²⁰ When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."

²¹ The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, "Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

²² Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, "Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? ²³ Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk?' ²⁴ But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So he said to the paralyzed man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." ²⁵ Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. ²⁶ Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, "We have seen remarkable things today."

We're in the 5th chapter of Luke's gospel if you'd like to turn there and follow along.

As I talked about in Children's Time, the word for today is *perseverance*, not only as the theme of this account, but all around us in these strange days we're living in—remarkable evidence of perseverance.

You see the signs around town here in Wilmore that say, "Don't give up."

You hear our governor saying, "Hang in there – we'll get through this, and we'll get through this..." What? "Together."

You see it in the sports on TV: the Alabama/Georgia game, the Florida State/North Carolina game, the Kentucky/Tennessee game yesterday – athletes not giving up.

You see it in all the elections that are coming up: the candidates hanging in, despite the polls or the pressures of the campaigns.

In marriages: choosing to persevere – to stay together – and work through the pressures of the days.

You see it in our schools: teachers trying to teach and students trying to learn and bus drivers trying to transport kids and custodians trying to clean in a difficult environment.

Right now, in our nation—in our *world*, really, but in our nation particularly—there's a whole lot of perseverance going on, and there has to be, if you want to survive difficult days.

Now, you don't have to, I guess. You can give up and lie down and die. That's about the only other option, and we should remember that unfortunately some are choosing that route, and the number who make that choice has risen pretty dramatically over the last few years. So, part of our mission as the church is to engage and work and pray

against that sense of hopelessness that's enveloping some in our society.

Because, if we are to survive difficult times and tense days and what may seem like insurmountable odds, we have to *choose*—and do all we can to encourage *others* to choose—to *persevere*.

When I was beginning doctoral work, someone said to me, "Remember: getting a doctorate is far more about *perseverance* than it is about *intelligence*."

Now, I will confess that at the time I didn't know quite how to take that counsel. I didn't know if that person gave *every* candidate that advice, or they just gave it to *me* because they'd already determined that my intelligence wasn't going to get it done.

Either way, though, it was good advice, and it applies not just to degrees, but to all of life, really. Intelligence is often over-rated, and perseverance is minimized.

When achieving something is *hard*, but still *worthwhile*, then in order to get it done, you just have to keep going.

Just keep at it. Keep going. That's perseverance.

And in our text today, we see that in addition to what we've talked about these past weeks—*trust, humility, confidence* and *hard-heartedness*—that Jesus provokes, in the hearts and lives of those around Him, *perseverance*.

Actually, lots of perseverance was going on in this event—this moment here in Luke 5, although frankly, not all of it toward positive ends.

Luke tells us that lots of Pharisees and teachers of the law were present in this house. Jesus had become something of a celebrity by now; word of His teaching and healing abilities had spread, so there were often large crowds surrounding Him.

But word had also spread among the Jewish religious establishment about the potential threat that Jesus was to the status quo, their dogma, their way of doing things. This is why a bunch of these guys showed up, according to verse 17, from all over the region and beyond.

And, they didn't come to be healed or to learn from Jesus. They came to *evaluate* Jesus—what He said and did, because they wanted to catch Him in something that they could use to discredit Him. They were on the edge of their seats, watching and listening very carefully—just hoping He'd do or say something they could use against Him.

They were a triggered bunch, just as there are bunches of triggered people today—triggered with regard to politics, race relations, the virus, the supreme court stuff. Whatever you consider to be the big news of today, there's a group that's ready to fight about it.

Of course, back in this day the big news was Jesus, and so these guys were locked and loaded and ready to pounce on Him if He did or said anything that even had a whiff of heresy or blasphemy.

So, you see, Jesus really did provoke perseverance in the Pharisees and Scribes—although they used it in a negative, destructive sense.

And then, of course, we have to recognize the perseverance of Jesus Himself. I mean, life was not easy for Jesus. You'd think if you were God in the flesh, life might be rather simple for you.

But not *here* — not in our broken world.

Jesus had to deal with the pressures of those religious professionals who were there to evaluate Him.

He had the pressures of leading people to a place where they would realize who He was. And He, of course, was starting from ground zero in that regard.

Jesus had the pressures that came with celebrity: the paparazzi, right, always taking His picture, tweeting about what He's doing, and posting Him on Facebook. He could hardly go anywhere without huge crowds forming — crowds that either wanted something from Him or who were trying to destroy Him.

And beside all that, Jesus carried a constant and enormous spiritual pressure upon Him. Satan was on Jesus' back 24-7, trying to trip Him or trick Him or talk Him out of His mission.

Just for Jesus to function through the day required a level of perseverance that you and I will never understand.

So, just in this little vignette — this one instance — there was a lot of perseverance going on.

But, of course, the perseverance we want to focus on is that of this group of guys who had a friend who needed Jesus.

Luke says, in verse 18, that there was a fellow who was paralyzed. You have to understand that in Jesus' day to be unable to walk almost always meant a life sentence of begging and shame and poverty.

But *this* paralyzed guy had something that is in some ways even more important than the ability to walk. This guy had *friends* — real friends — who loved him and cared *about* and *for* him. They cared enough to scoop him up and put him on a mat and carry him to this house, because they'd heard that Jesus was there, and they'd heard about what He'd done in other places.

So, they came in confidence that Jesus could do something for their friend.

As they turned the corner on the block where the house was, they knew right away that they were at the right place, because the place was crowded. The second chapter of Mark's gospel — his rendition of this event — describes it even more completely. The place was just packed — and not this socially-distanced sort of packed. I mean packed like "Wal-Mart-used-to-be-at-five-in-the-morning-on-Black-Friday" packed; like a "Taylor-Swift-concert-in-Solomon's-Porch" sort of packed. [Solomon's Porch is a small local café.]

There was no way that they themselves could get through the front door. They couldn't even get *near* the front door, so they certainly weren't going to be able to get in there with their friend on a *stretcher*.

But between their devotion to their friend and their confidence in Jesus, they stood there, thought a minute, and then hatched this plan to come in from above — to go to the roof.

Now, that sounds like a wild idea to us because we think of a roof like what's on most of our houses — or even the roof here. I mean, can you imagine three or four guys

trying to carry a guy on a mat up a ladder and then up an 8 or maybe 10/12 pitch roof? That's not going to happen, and if they'd tried it, it wouldn't be long before they'd all be on the ground with broken legs.

But, of course, in Jesus' day, houses were different.

They had almost flat roofs and most homes even had some sort of stairway that led up there, because they were used as outdoor rooms.

So, these guys carry their friend up to the roof — again, it's Mark that gives us the detail that they actually *dug through* the roof material — and they somehow cut a hole, and not a small hole. It was a hole big enough for a man to pass through lying horizontally!

Now, get that image in your mind, OK? I picture this, and I can't help but wonder what the people there were thinking while all this was going on. I mean the people inside, below in the room there with Jesus. They had to know something was going on above them. If someone were on the roof here right now and began cutting through — clawing or sawing through the roof above us — in order to make a hole *that big*, that's going to make some noise. And, we're all going to, first, wake up and then wonder, "What on earth is going on here?"

And especially the owners of the house, right? I mean, they had to be, like, "What in the world are you doing? Somebody, get up there and stop them!"

I'm thinking that the only way this was allowed to happen is because whatever Jesus was doing there inside at that moment — whether teaching or healing people, whatever He was doing — was so mesmerizing that everyone was so focused on Him that they weren't even aware of what was going on above them.

Nobody falls asleep on Jesus.

Now, somebody did on the Apostle Paul, remember? Chapter 20 in Acts tells us a guy named Eutychus, fell asleep and fell out the window during one of Paul's messages.

I'm so glad that account is in the Bible — it has made every preacher in the world feel better at one point or another.

But *nobody* falls asleep on Jesus. Jesus is *completely captivating*, such that, if you're willing to be in His presence — I mean really put yourself in the same room with Him — what happens is that He becomes so *attractive*, so *engaging*, that *everything else* becomes faint background noise.

It had to be true, even for the home-owner.

"The hole in the roof? Ah, that can be fixed! But just look at what Jesus did!"

Who wouldn't trade a hole in their roof for the wholeness and healing of a person? There's something wrong with the priorities of anyone who wouldn't. There's something coming between them and Jesus and what Jesus values.

Of course, you know how this story ends. The guys lower their friend down into the room there — which I'd think had to have been quite the experience for everyone involved, especially the guy on the mat, right? I mean, he wasn't strapped onto some EMT's stretcher or stokes basket, so that had to be quite a ride for him. Luke says they let him down, right in front of Jesus.

And as Jesus sees this happening, He looks up and tells the guys, "You know you're going to have to pay for that roof!"

No, as Jesus sees this happening, He's *amazed* at the *faith*—the *confidence* and *perseverance*, *not* so much of the *paralyzed fellow*, although he surely had faith himself. But more than that, Jesus is amazed at these *friends* of his, to the point that Jesus heals the man, both *spiritually* and *physically*—*and instantly!* The fellow gets up right then, praises God and carries home the mat that carried him to Jesus.

Which, of course, made the Pharisees and Scribes there just furious. But that's another story.

What I want us to consider today is the sort of *perseverance* that Jesus provoked in the lives of this guy's friends and *what that perseverance accomplished*.

Those guys believed that Jesus could make a difference in their friend's life, and they did everything in their power to get him to Jesus. *So convinced* were they that *nothing* was going to stand in their way. No *risk* was too great.

What an *amazing* amount of *confidence* they had in *Jesus*, and when *that* was *combined* with the amazing amount of *love* they had for their *friend*, you see, what resulted was a blessing for everyone!

Everybody won! For the crowd that was there: their faith was bolstered and they had a new reason to celebrate and praise God! The formerly paralyzed man certainly won, but so did that man's family and his friends. Even his neighbors and his town—all of society, you see? In one way or another, everybody wins when people put their trust in Jesus.

And here, it was made possible by the perseverance of that little group of friends.

When one of them maybe looked at the other, as they were heading up to the roof, and said, "Ah, I wonder if we should do this," the other two or three were there to encourage—to bolster his faith.

When another hesitated because he started to think, "Man, how much are we going to have to pay to fix this roof?" the others said, "Don't worry—it'll be worth it!"

That is Christianity, Christian behavior, Christian community:

- to have the *confidence in Jesus* and *love for one another* that keeps you moving and that gives you reason to push on and to have hope for the future,
- to have the perseverance to, as the Apostle Paul wrote to the Galatian church, "*not grow weary in doing good*,"
- to "*not give up meeting together*," as the writer of Hebrews wrote,
- to not give up to present circumstance, but to look for Jesus to work out His will—
even in hard times,
even when the future seems impossible,
even when the paralysis looks as though it will be life-long.

We choose to keep on going, because Jesus, when you really know Him, provokes *perseverance*.

Because Jesus can make a difference.

No matter what, Jesus can make a difference.

Do you believe that?

Do you believe that like these guys believed it? For themselves, and for those you love?

Listen, there's a lot happening in our world these days that conspires to steal our hope. There's a lot going on that would like to steal our will to carry on, ourselves, and also our will to stay engaged with others.

Suicides in our nation are increasing at a never before seen rate¹, and, while there are other reasons for this too, the fact is, the real cause is spiritual. When people no longer believe in a God who can act in miraculous, supernatural ways, all we're left with is a broken earth and broken lives and broken bodies and broken relationships, and frankly, not a lot of reason to go on.

That's why Jesus really is the answer—the only answer—to our problems, to our families' problems, to our nations' problems and to our world's problems. The issues that plague us—that *paralyze* us—need *supernatural* solutions.

And if you don't believe those exist, then you have very little reason to keep on.

But, if you believe in Jesus, you have *every* reason to keep on—to keep doing and working for good. You have every reason to persevere.

But half-heartedness won't cut it. These guys did not come to Jesus half-heartedly, and that's why Jesus did what He did. He saw the faith that was behind their perseverance, and it moved Him to make a divine difference in their lives.

So, the question is, are you following Jesus with *all your heart* today?

Are we doing all we can—even cutting holes in roofs—to bring:

- our families to Jesus,
- our friends to Jesus,
- our communities, and
- even our nation to Jesus?

They need to know, and we need to remember, that through all this craziness that is life today, He is still very able to do more than we can even ask or think.

Jesus is able to make a difference in our homes, in our families, in our neighborhoods, and in our church. He can make a difference in your office and on your campus.

Wherever you are, Jesus can make a difference there. That's why He is our reason for persevering—for keeping on.

If you need to make a new declaration of perseverance in faith—in following Jesus—today, why don't you do that?

Closing Song: *He is Able*

Benediction: May the Spirit of Christ drive the truth of those words deep into us, and so provoke in our hearts the sort of confidence—the unyielding perseverance that pushes us forward in faith—and—that carries all those around us to Jesus.

¹<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/databriefs/db362.htm>