

THE REAL JESUS: HIS MINISTRY

Week Two | May 27, 2018 | Jesus is Sovereign Over the Physical World

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

Before your group meets next time, spend some time alone in God's Word reading through this week's text, Luke 5:12–16 and Luke 9:10–17. Pray that God, through His Spirit, would bring to life the truth of this text and how it applies to your life

THIS WEEK

KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

The Real Jesus wasn't just a nice guy who helped many hurting people. He is Lord over the physical world.

THEOLOGY APPLIED

Because Jesus is Lord over the physical world, we who are physically needy can come to Him as our Great Physician and Provider.

MEDITATE

"Lord, if you will, you can make me clean." (Luke 5:12b)

GETTING STARTED

+ Use this section to prepare your heart and mind for the truths of this week. This section will help to introduce the focus of this week's lesson.

Q: *What kind of stories are the most difficult for you to believe? What would make you classify something as a myth or a legend?*

Breaking News—Six Jars of Water Suddenly Filled with Wine. Man Defies Law of Gravity and Walks on Water. Blind Man Healed Instantly—Doctors Astonished. Man with Terminal Illness Completely Cured. Five Loaves and Two Fish Feed Thousands. Dead Man Alive and Walking. Imagine how you would react if you saw these headlines! You would likely have many questions before blindly accepting such claims. In a world of what many call “fake news,” you would want to know who the writers were. You would want to know what kind of biases or self-interest lay beneath their “factual” accounts. You would probably seek an explanation for the supernatural event, proving that it was either an optical illusion, a magic trick, or a product of sensationalism. After all, you wouldn’t want to naively believe something only later to discover it is a myth.

Many historical scholars admit that the book of Luke is an historically reliable document, even by modern scientific standards. The overwhelming majority also affirm that Jesus was a real, historical person. However, they draw the line at miracles. Arguably, the most prominent secular New Testament scholar is a man named Bart Ehrman. Dr. Ehrman is convinced that Jesus was a real person. He writes, “The reality is whatever else you may think about Jesus, he certainly does exist. ...And for anyone to whom both evidence and the past matter, a dispassionate consideration of the case makes it quite plain: Jesus did exist.” Yet Ehrman believes that the gospel writers embellished the life of Jesus by adding miraculous elements and sensational stories in order to gain a following. They took a real man and made a legend out of Him, a practice often done in ancient literature. For example, Alexander the Great’s mother was allegedly impregnated by a Greek god. Despite this mythical story, most people are still convinced Alexander the Great existed as a real, historical person. They simply seek to discard the mythical elements from the reliable historical account. What scholars like Ehrman do with the gospel accounts of Jesus is the same. They disregard the claims they consider difficult to believe and seek the “Real Jesus” behind the myth. But are they really uncovering the Real Jesus, or are they creating their own portrait of Him?

Q: *What part of Jesus’ life and ministry is most difficult for you to believe?*

Q: *How would you respond to Ehrman’s position on Jesus?*

■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

Last week we saw how Jesus is more than a good teacher, He is sovereign over the spiritual world. This week we will see that Jesus is more than a myth and more than a man who did nice things for people. He is sovereign over the physical world. We will learn from Luke about the credibility of His miracles.

1. JESUS IS SOVEREIGN OVER SICKNESS

2. JESUS IS THE PROVIDER OF OUR NEEDS

GOING DEEPER

+ This next section will help show what God's Word says about this week's particular focus. Read through the Scripture passages and connect the text to this week's biblical truth.

JESUS IS SOVEREIGN OVER SICKNESS

■ LUKE 5:12-16

Q: *What kind of request did the man make to Jesus?*

Q: *What is unexpected about the way Jesus responded to the leper's request?*

As a physician, Luke knew a lot about the effects of disease, both on the suffering person and on the community. Leprosy is an incredibly contagious disease that affects the skin and nerves. It causes discoloration and lumps on the skin which lead to horrible deformities. It frequently results in a lack of ability to feel pain, which means the suffering person often will injure themselves unknowingly, causing great harm to their bodies. For example, they might frequently burn themselves cooking or washing themselves with scalding water. Vermin would chew on them and insects would attack them as they slept. The disease is known as a “painless hell.”

Leprosy is contagious and deadly, which is why lepers were removed from the community and sent to a leper colony outside the city. There is great social stigma associated with leprosy. Even today the word “leper” conjures

up images of death, decay, and danger. Lepers experienced complete social isolation. They were no longer able to live with their family and friends or worship in the synagogue. It was illegal to even greet a leper or come within a hundred cubits of them if they were upwind or four cubits if they were downwind. If anyone ever came near them, lepers were required by law to yell, “Unclean! Unclean!” Imagine having to shout this about yourself. Imagine having to keep people away from you at all times, knowing that you were hopelessly unclean. You were a permanent outcast, just awaiting your death. The social implications of this disease meant the afflicted did not only suffer physically, but emotionally, mentally, and spiritually as well. The ancient historian Josephus described lepers as “dead men walking.”

Dr. Luke tells us of an encounter Jesus had with a man who was “full of leprosy,” meaning he was at an advanced stage. In his desperation, the man broke the customs and the laws about staying far away and drew near to Jesus. The people around probably cursed at him and ran away as soon as they saw him coming, but Jesus didn’t. When he came face to face with Him, Luke says, “he fell on his face and begged him, ‘Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.’” What an incredible sign of faith! The man knew he was hopelessly unclean and had no ability to make himself clean. In fact, no one did. He had been abandoned by all others, but he held out hope that Jesus would hear his cries for mercy and not abandon him. He knew he was a beggar who had nothing to offer. He was in the perfect condition to receive grace. Poor in spirit, he came with empty hands.

Commenting on this scene, Kent Hughes points out, “If you would come to Christ, this is the way you must come—saying ‘Unclean, unclean.’ In fact, if you come saying, ‘Only partly unclean’ or ‘I’m 25 percent clean’ or ‘I’m 10 percent clean,’ he will not receive you. This is the great tragedy of the comfortable today—we cannot accept that we are not acceptable. This is why the gospel is such an offense!”

The people who were standing by watching were certainly offended. How dare this man break the law and have the audacity to come before Jesus! The man knelt before Jesus in humble worship and submission. He did not demand Jesus heal him, he simply made a declaration of faith that if Jesus willed to heal him, He was fully able to do so, even at his advanced stage of leprosy. Within this statement was a humble request for Jesus to have mercy upon him.

In verse 13, we read Jesus’ response. To the horror of the onlookers, Jesus stretched out His hand and touched the diseased man, something the man had not experienced for many years. “I will,” He said. “Be clean.” Immediately the leprosy left him. His deformed body was made completely whole. His hair grew back and his skin was smooth and soft. The hands and feet that had been knobs from so much injury grew fingers and toes. All this happened before their very eyes.

- Q: *Think of physical conditions you or your loved ones are experiencing. How does this story encourage you?*
- Q: *The man was neither cynical nor presumptuous. Discuss how both cynicism and presumption prohibit true faith.*
- Q: *Do you see evidence of cynicism in your life? If so, do you find it makes you reluctant to go to Jesus with your burdens?*
- Q: *Do you demand Jesus heal or provide instantly the way you want or think best? When He doesn't, do you grow angry or disillusioned? What can you learn from the man in this story?*

JESUS IS THE PROVIDER OF OUR NEEDS

LUKE 9:10-17

- Q: *At the end of the day, what did the disciples want Jesus to tell the people and why?*
- Q: *What responsibilities did Jesus give the disciples?*

After many months of intense ministry, Jesus and the disciples needed to rest. They needed a break from the crowds and some time alone to recover. But as they withdrew to retreat on the north side of the lake, the crowds followed them. There was no rest for the weary. The disciples were upset about the way their plans were ruined, but Jesus wasn't. He welcomed the people. He taught them. He healed those who needed healing. He healed not only their spiritual and emotional needs, but their physical needs as well. He communed with them.

At the end of the day, the disciples came to Jesus and suggested He send the crowds away to find themselves some

food so the disciples could go on to their retreat. Jesus' response must have shocked the disciples. "You give them something to eat." Jesus wouldn't let them send the people away to find food elsewhere on their own. He wanted them to be cared for.

Imagine pulling off a dinner for a huge crowd with no food. It would be an impossible task! But that is exactly what Jesus asked His disciples to do—an impossible task. They were inadequate and under-resourced. Instead of sending everyone on their own way, Jesus calls the disciples to stay, serve, and trust Him to provide the resources.

While the disciples didn't care about the physical needs of the people, Jesus did. While the disciples were unable to do much to meet the physical needs of the people, Jesus was. It is through the disciples' evident inability that everyone saw Jesus' ability. Not only did Jesus provide food to fill the bellies of thousands of people, He even provided leftovers! There were twelve baskets—one for each of the disciples to take away as a reminder that Jesus always provides. Jesus made the five loaves and two fish in the first place, and He made them feed five thousand men, plus just as many women and children. While we are unable to control the physical world, the One who created it from nothing demonstrates His complete sovereignty over it by the way He provides for our needs.

The disciples were not the ones who provided the bread for the people. Everyone knew Jesus was the miraculous provider. He was the host of the meal. However, the disciples played a very important role. Jesus provided the bread, but He put it in the disciples' hands and told them to distribute it to the people. He made the disciples His hands and feet. When God provides for His people, He uses other people. He could provide for the hungry by dropping bread from heaven. After all, He's done that before! But He more often chooses to use other people to be the distributors of what He provides. He taught the disciples that when they see someone in physical need, they are not to just pray God provides for them; they are to be the way God provides for them. They aren't the Provider, but they are called to be the tangible way Jesus expresses His faithfulness to those in need.

Throughout history there have been many people who have helped others who are physically needy. However, the Real Jesus stands apart from every other charitable person by virtue of the fact that He is not the distributor of goods, He is the maker of them. He wasn't merely a generous person giving away all His possessions to help the poor. He is the God of the universe who holds all things together, the sustainer of life.

Q: *How do you feel when you see someone in need? What is your immediate reaction to them? What holds you back from helping them? Is it an underlying belief that they deserve it? Is it a lack of resources? Is your life insulated from people who have genuine need?*

Q: *Are you anxious about finances? How does this story remind you that your provision ultimately comes from the hand of the Lord and not from your own efforts or circumstances?*

NEXT STEPS

+ *Connect the truths from God's Word to your daily life. Process how what you've learned this week will impact the way you live beyond today and into the future.*

Q: *In your own life do you tend to see the spiritual as more important than the physical, or vice versa? How do this week and last week's studies give you a more holistic view of life?*

Q: *What kind of miracles have you seen Jesus do in your own life?*

Q: *Spend some time reflecting on the ways God has provided for your physical needs in the past. How should this track record encourage you to go to Him with your physical needs?*

PRAY

+ *Use these prayer points to connect your time in prayer to this week's focus.*

- God, thank You that You are fully in control over the world and nothing happens or doesn't happen without Your knowledge and permission.

- Father, forgive me for thinking I am in some way in control of my own physical circumstances. Allow me to lay them at Your feet, knowing that You are the One who heals, provides, and restores.
- Jesus, thank You for caring not only about my soul but about my physical life as well. Thank You for coming to redeem them both.

COMMENTARY

LUKE 5:13 Jesus is not made unclean by touching the leper, as is the logic of the Jewish law. Normally, if something unclean touches something clean, it renders the clean thing unclean. However, Jesus is different. He, the Holy One, is able to cleanse that which is unclean.

LUKE 9:14 Luke's account says there were five thousand; however, it was common practice to only count the men in the crowd. Most likely, there would have been over ten thousand people, counting women and children.

LUKE 9:15 Notice that the disciples' obedience preceded their understanding. They did not know what Jesus was going to do, but they trusted Him and followed what He said.

**All exegetical content and commentary resourcing for this lesson was provided by the ESV Study Bible Commentary Notes, the Christ Centered Exposition (Luke), Preaching the Word (Luke), and The Historical Reliability of the Gospels by Craig Blomberg.*