

JESUS' POWER TO FORGIVE SINS

Mark 2:1-12

Key Verse: 2:10

“But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...”

The Bible declares that every single person in the world is a sinner (Ro 3:10). And the wages of sin is death (Ro 6:23). So we are all like death-row inmates. But the God of mercy sent his one and only Son Jesus to save us from our sins. Jesus paid the price of our life with his own. This morning, we want to think about what it means Jesus has the power and authority to forgive our sins.

First, Jesus preaches the word of God. (1-2)

In Mark chapter 1, we learned that after his baptism by John, Jesus began to preach the good news of the kingdom of God. He also healed many sick people and drove out demons. Despite his busy schedule, Jesus found time early in the morning to pray to God to renew his spiritual direction. His disciples were excited about his successful healing ministry in Capernaum, but Jesus told them, “Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so that I can preach there also. This is why I have come” (38).

Look at verses 1-2. *A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. So many gathered that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them.* Jesus had spent many days preaching the word of God in the nearby villages. When a hideous-looking leper came to him by faith, he had compassion on him and healed the man. A few days later, he again entered Capernaum, the home base of his ministry. When the people heard that he had come home, many gathered at the house where he was staying. There was no room left, not even outside the door. No doubt Jesus knew why so many people came to him. They had heard about his miracle healing. They had heard about how he healed a man with leprosy, saying “I am willing. Be healed.” Jesus probably noticed many sick people among the crowd.

What did Jesus do for the people? Jesus immediately began to teach them the word of God. The crowd gathered there, hoping that he would solve their medical problems. They wanted to see him perform more miracles. But Jesus first taught them the word of God. He probably said to them, “The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!” Why did Jesus disappoint the crowd by teaching the word of God? It is because the word of God gives people eternal life. Miracle healing was what they wanted from him. But Jesus wanted to give them something much more precious, something that was not temporary (even miracle healing is temporary unless the person repents and believes the good news). Jesus knew that only the word of God could set them free from the bondage of their sins (Jn 8:31-32). So he began to teach them the word of God.

Second, Jesus sees our faith (3-5a)

Someone interrupted his Bible study session. Look at verse 3. *Some men came, bringing to him a paralytic, carried by four of them.* Mark does not tell us why they cared so much for the paralytic and how this man became a paralytic. Perhaps the five men were good friends. They were very dear to one another. But one day, one of them had a stroke and was paralyzed. His four friends felt as if they had a stroke themselves. They had great compassion for their friend. But they were utterly helpless. There was nothing they could do to reverse his paralysis. But one day, they heard wonderful news. They heard that Jesus healed many sick people, including a man with leprosy (1:29-45). They also learned that Jesus was in town. The four friends said to one another, "This is it. This is a God-given chance for us to help our friend!" They believed in their hearts that their paralytic friend would be cured if Jesus laid his hand on him. So they decided to take him to Jesus. Carrying their sick friend on a mat, they came to the house where Jesus was teaching the Bible. However, the house was already full of many sick people waiting in line. They pushed through the crowd, trying to get him to Jesus. But too many people had already crammed around Jesus, hoping he would heal their own sickness. Some had stomach ulcers, some backaches, and some had hemorrhoids. Each one thought that his or her case was most urgent. No one wanted to concede. But the friends of the paralytic would not give up. Where there was a will, there was a way. Suddenly the four friends had a brilliant idea.

What did they do? Look at verse 4. *Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus and, after digging through it, lowered the mat the paralyzed man was lying on.* In doing so, they must have offended many people. The owner of the house might have called the police. Other people were angry, because they had been waiting for hours in line and now these guys were trying to cut in.

However, the four men were so determined to get their friend to Jesus that they did not mind hearing all the screaming and complaining. There is a saying, "A friend in need is a friend indeed." They were indeed true friends to the paralytic. Their compassionate hearts toward him were flaring so intensely that they would overcome any obstacles. They climbed up on the roof and began to dig a hole through the roof above Jesus. Then they lowered the paralytic to Jesus. A lot of debris was falling to the floor. Jesus could not continue teaching.

What did Jesus say to these men whose action caused such a commotion? Look at verse 5a. It says that *Jesus saw their faith.* The people saw only their disorderly conduct. But Jesus saw their faith. What kind of faith did Jesus see in them? He saw their beautiful shepherd's heart for one person, and above all, their faith in the Savior. They had great faith in Jesus' healing power. They knew that paralysis was incurable, but they brought the man to Jesus, believing that Jesus would make him whole. Their faith enabled them to overcome all obstacles to come to Jesus.

There are many young people around us who are unable to come to Jesus on their own. They need our help. We can be their friends like those in this passage and we can bring them to Jesus. But we must overcome many obstacles along the way. Some students say, "I just don't have time to study the Bible. I am busy." Others say, "I am more interested in meeting other Christians than studying the Bible." Still, others say, "If I had time, I would make more money. I need more money." It is easy for us to just give up on them. After all, why should we try to help them to come to Jesus when we ourselves are busy with our own lives? But the friends of the paralytic did not give up on their friends. They found a way to get him to Jesus. They had a heart's desire to do so. They had faith to overcome all obstacles. And they had the joy of seeing their friends healed by Jesus. May God help each of us to have this kind faith as we struggle to lead young people to Jesus!

Third, "Son, your sins are forgiven" (5-8)

What did Jesus do for the paralytic? Look at verse 5. *When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."* Notice that Jesus called him "Son." To people's eyes, this paralytic looked pathetic. He was burdensome and smelly. Many people wanted to avoid him. But Jesus, out of his compassion, called him son. To Jesus, the paralytic was one who was created in the image of God. Jesus wanted to restore him so that he could be a blessing to others instead of being a burden. When Jesus called him son, the man's heart must've been touched. He began to feel the love of God when Jesus called him son.

Look at verse 5 again. *When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."* Jesus said to him, "Son, your sins are forgiven." Jesus did not say, "Son, your paralysis is cured." Instead, he said, "Son, your sins are forgiven." This was not something he or his friends expected to hear. The paralytic thought that his sickness was the source of all his problems. His friends also thought that the paralysis was the problem. But Jesus looked at his problem differently. Jesus knew that his paralysis was a problem in his life. He could not function as a normal person because of his condition. But in Jesus' eyes, his physical paralysis was not the most urgent problem. The root problem in his life was his sin problem. So Jesus said, "Your sins are forgiven."

What is sin and why is it so serious? While crime is to violate man-made law, sin is to violate God's law. To sin is to go against God and his word (1Jn 5:17). It is to live apart from God and to follow one's own desires. It is to live to please oneself with no regard to God and other people. The most devastating thing about sin is that it cuts us off from God. It is like a gigantic barrier is erected between God and us. Our relationship with God is severed. We cannot communicate with him. It is like a young child is separated from his father, left all alone, with no protection from all kinds of dangers. Some people claim that this is good, living a carefree life with no regard to God. They say they can be happy without God. But the Bible teaches us that man cannot be truly happy apart from God—the source of his life, just as a tree cannot live happily when it is cut from its root. In fact, a person who is cut from God because of his sin is dead, spiritually. Only Jesus can give him life. One cannot be truly happy until he comes to know the love of God. That's why Jesus said to the man, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

Like paralysis, sin makes a person powerless (Ro 5:6). Sin makes a person burdensome to others. Sin is a sickness that kills a person's soul. The paralytic's real problem was sin. Of course, his paralysis was a problem. He couldn't get a job. He couldn't get married. He did not want to live. In his deep fatalism, he cursed his life, his parents and even God. He was paralyzed not only in body but also in spirit. He really needed the forgiveness of God. Likewise, there are many young people who are spiritually paralyzed. In their sin of pride, they ignore God and God's purpose in their lives. They are dying in their sins, but they only complain about the small inconveniences of life. We must help them to come to Jesus!

Fourth, Jesus has authority on earth to forgive sins (9-12)

Jesus loved the paralytic and wanted to help him, first spiritually and then physically. Jesus is indeed the good shepherd for all hopeless paralytics. But there were some people who were unhappy about what Jesus said to the paralytic. Look at verses 6-7. When the religious leaders heard Jesus say, "Your sins are forgiven," they thought to themselves, "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" They did not see Jesus' compassionate heart toward the paralytic. They did not see the love of God in Jesus. They were spiritually blind. They were spiritually paralyzed by their stubborn hearts.

Immediately Jesus knew that this was what they were thinking (8). Jesus knows what a person is thinking in his or her heart. We cannot hide anything from Jesus. What did Jesus say to the teachers of the law? Look at verses 9-10: *"Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk?' But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins..."* He said to the paralytic *"I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home."* In human eyes, it seemed easy to say, "Your sins are forgiven," because no one could verify the effect of his words on the spot. But spiritually, healing a physical sickness was nothing compared to forgiving sins. But Jesus wanted all of them to know that he had the power to forgive sins. So he said, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home."

The atmosphere was very hostile toward Jesus. But Jesus loved this man. He wanted to forgive his sins (10). Jesus looked around at the people, and then turned his attention to the paralytic and said, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home" (11). What happened? Look at verse 12a. *"He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all."* What a great sight! This man, who couldn't even move his fingers, suddenly got up and walked. It was a miracle. However, Jesus showed them something more important through the event. By healing the paralytic in front of the people, Jesus declared that he has the power to forgive sins. Some people do not even know what sin is, and some don't even care, even though sin is the most fundamental problem facing humanity. The thing is, even if people know what sin is, they are helpless to do anything to solve the sin problem. No one can solve his or her sin problem. No one can solve other people's sin problem. Jesus is the only one who has the power to forgive sins. And Jesus wants us to come to him to receive the forgiveness of sins.

Jesus said, "... you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins..." We should know that Jesus has authority to forgive sins. I heard that in this internet age, one can go online and confess his sins anonymously. Then other anonymous people would read the confessions, and click on the button that says, "Your sins are forgiven." The person may feel a little better. But sins cannot be forgiven in this way. Sin is so terrible that it demands life-blood. Only Jesus has the authority to forgive sins because he gave his life on the cross as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (Jn 1:29).

A famous movie actor fell from a horse and was paralyzed. After several years of physical therapy, he was able to wiggle one of his fingers. The news media reported this as a small miracle. Indeed it was remarkable and we admired his courage. But I was sad to hear him say that he did not know if God exists. He was quoted as saying, "I'm thinking, God, how did it happen I can't even do that? I mean, how can this be my life?" Sadly he did not recover from his paralysis. But even if stem-cell technology had helped him to walk on his feet as he predicted, without the forgiveness of Jesus, he would've still died in his sin. A bigger miracle would have been the healing of his paralyzed soul through the healing touch of the Messiah.

When Joni Earekson Tata was a teenager, she had a diving accident and she became paralyzed from the neck down. At the hospital she wished to commit suicide but she couldn't even do that because she was paralyzed. But a true miracle happened in her life. She met Jesus. She heard the voice of Jesus, "Daughter, your sins are forgiven." She is still confined in her wheelchair, but her life is a source of inspiration for many people. She joyfully shares the good news of Jesus and her life has touched many lives. What a beautiful story! In Jesus, there is no fatalism. In Jesus any person can live a life that has a purpose and meaning.

Look at verse 12. When the people of Capernaum saw the paralytic pick up his mat and walk, they were amazed. They said, "We have never seen anything like this!" Unlike the religious leaders, the ordinary people were honest and unbiased. They marveled at Jesus' power to forgive sins. We are also amazed at not only his power to forgive sins, but also his compassion toward sinners like us.

Jesus gave a new life to the paralyzed man. He became a child of God, thanks to the faith of his friends. Likewise, Jesus can give us a new life when we come to him. In our Bible study last week, Ben and I thought about how our lives changed since Jesus healed us from our sin-sickness. We now have a new perspective on life. We have a new value system. We have a new hope in Christ. We have a purpose and direction in life. We can live each day to honor and glorify God. This is what Jesus' healing can do to a sin-sick person. A paralyzed man can walk around the campus to deliver the good news of Jesus Christ! Praise Jesus who has authority on earth to forgive sins!