**NEW LIFE IN JESUS**

January 20, 2013

Mark 2:1-22

Key Verse 2:5 “When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven.’”

Today’s passage includes two events: Jesus heals a paralytic, and Jesus calls Levi the tax collector to be one of his disciples. Some people have a strange paralysis of the body. Though they have no physical problem that doctors can find, they confront an invisible power that keeps them on the couch or in bed, helplessly. When they have to think through a problem such as jobs or homework, they become blank. Some people have paralyzed hearts. They never feel love, compassion, or grace, though they received much. They can watch “The Passion of the Christ,” without any emotional response at all. Some have paralyzed lips. They never say, ‘Thank you,” or “Praise God.” It is due to their sins. Jesus declares today that he has power to forgive sins and make us whole. Jesus also calls Levi the tax collector. Levi was the person who wanted to start a new life, but he was stuck in his situation. He has no strength to change himself, and even if he wanted, the society would not accept him. But in Jesus we have a new life, a second chance. Jesus’ forgiveness makes us the holy children of God and gives us a dynamic new life. Let’s accept his grace today.

**First**, Jesus said, “Son, your sins are forgiven” (1-5). Look at verses 3-4. “Some men came, bringing to him a paralytic, carried by four of them. 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.” From the way this man and his friends behave, you can feel sense of urgency; you can almost sense the desperation. They want Jesus to touch their friend and heal him. But they can’t even get close to the door. But they would not give up. Where there was a will, there was a way. One of them said, “Look, there is nobody up on the roof! Let’s dig a hole on the roof.” They don’t care if they ruin the roof. They don’t care if they upset the meeting. All they care is that they have a friend who is paralyzed - and Jesus can heal him. Nothing else matters. Scholars tell us that homes of that day had a unique flat roof, made of wooden beams that rested on the walls of the building. These beams were placed about 3 to 4 feet apart and were covered with thick branches, brush, mud, and clay. Those inside the house must have heard the noise up on the roof as the 4 men tore away the covering tiles to make a hole big enough for their friend to fit down through. And you can see the crowd - as the debris from the roof begins to rain down on them. You can see them scream to their feet and struggle to get out of the way.

The room is quiet now... the crowd is silent - waiting to see what will happen next. Sunlight streams down from the hole in the roof. You can see particles of dust hanging in air. The room is filled with a haze. And then - the stream of light is blocked as the friends swing the mat over the hole and they begin to lower their friend into the room. There was Jesus standing watching quietly until the paralyzed man lays on ground in front of him. Jesus looks up to see the anxious faces looking down through the hole in the ceiling. He looks down on the embarrassed paralyzed man on the mat. The whole room waits eagerly... what will he say? What will he do? Will he heal this man? Or will Jesus become angry and order the man out of the room? And then, Jesus does the most bizarre thing: He says to the paralyzed man: “Son, your sins are forgiven.” This is not what the paralyzed man and his friends had hoped for. He had come to be healed - not forgiven.

And then, there were some teachers of the law. They are not thinking about the paralyzed man and his disappointment. They are not thinking about why Jesus didn’t heal this poor man’s broken body. These are theologians - they’re thinking... theology: Only God could forgive sins. Jesus waits for a couple of minutes, and then he addresses these theologians. “Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, ’Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins....’ He said to the paralyzed man, ’I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.’” Immediately, the man feels warmth that starts from the center of his being works its way down his limbs. And he realizes - I am healed! He leaps to his feet and excitedly begins jumping around. He shouts out praise to God. And everybody in the room gets caught up in the man’s excitement and they begin to jump around and hug and praise God.

Why did Jesus say “your sins are forgiven” Why not “your paralysis is healed?” Consider: this is the only time in all of the gospels that a sick man is ever told that his sins are forgiven. Jesus chooses this setting, this audience, to make this announcement: He had come to bring forgiveness to mankind. Jesus understood the agony of the paralytic. He didn’t mean to be useless or helpless. He didn’t want to be a burden to his friends all the time. He wanted to contribute something useful and positive to his society. Moreover, he was under self-condemnation. He felt that he was cursed by God for his sins, forsaken by God. Jesus didn’t judge him for all of his failures and despair. Jesus saw him with hope, and embraced him as he was. He told him, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” He meant, “You are a holy child of God. God is pleased with you, and accept you as a son.” This assurance solved all his problems.

Jesus came to this world to forgive our sins. He wants to restore our relationship with God and lift our burden of sins, and make us hold children of God. When Jesus forgives our sins, we are no longer paralyzed by our shame and guilt before God. We want to blame someone else for our troubles, our helplessness and failures. We want to have an excuse for lying down on our mat and giving up. But the truth is that we are sinners. Our sin cut the relationship with God and with others. We must accept responsibility for our own lives, whatever our abilities or weaknesses might be. And we must come to Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins, so that we can begin a new life as a source of blessing for others. Then we are set free, and can live as powerful servants of the Almighty God. Jesus forgives our sins! It is the good news of great joy for all people!

**Second**, Jesus called Levi to follow him (13-17). Look at verse 14. “As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector’s booth. ‘Follow me,’ Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him.” Against the background of Jesus’ ministry to thronging crowds, the calling of one man may not have generated much interest at the time. However, in gospel history, it was a most important event. Levi became a disciple of Jesus, St. Matthew. We are reminded here that Jesus called working men while they were at their jobs. Jesus called men of some ability. Jesus called ordinary men, who would be willing to learn from him, not religious professionals. Then who was Levi? Levi was a tax collector. He collected taxes from his own people for the Romans, their enemy. They were guilty of collecting more taxes than were due. Presumably, they kept the excess for their own use. So they were regarded as public sinners along with adulterers, robbers, prostitutes. These days, they were like drug dealers who do not care about others if only they can make money. Their disgrace extended to their family. When Levi made the decision to become a tax collector, he must have thought that money would make him happy. But it is not true. Money can buy many things. But money cannot buy happiness, love, or righteousness. When Levi realized this, it seemed too late. His decision to become a tax collector seemed irrevocable. We can imagine Levi’s inner suffering, even though he was rich. He was despised by his own people. He had no respect from his children and from his wife. He wanted to start a new life, but he had no strength to quit his job, and there was no way that he would be accepted in his society. In his day, religious leaders made a rule, “Once a sinner, always a sinner.” There was no second chance.

When Jesus saw Levi sitting at the tax collector’s booth, Jesus said to him, “Follow me.” Jesus invited Levi to be his disciple. Jesus saw Levi with hope. Jesus knew that his power to forgive sins could transform Levi into a new person. Jesus believed that Levi would learn to love God, to love others, and how to sacrifice. Jesus believed Levi would grow in godly character and become one of the best men who ever lived, St. Matthew. When Jesus said, “Follow me,” it meant, “You are a new creation in me. You will have a new life. You are a holy child of God.” To human eyes, Levi seemed to have no interest in spiritual things. But this was not true. Levi was hungering for true righteousness. Levi was ready to make a new start if he only had the opportunity. He believed that Jesus could forgive his sins and give him a new beginning. Levi had made so many bad choices and decisions in his life. But when Jesus called him, he didn’t hold on to his despair, his shame or his human pride. He got up and followed Jesus, leaving everything from his past life behind. He was ready to begin a new life.

Levi was so happy. He threw a big dinner party for Jesus and his disciples. Many “public sinners” gathered and were eating and drinking with them. The grace of God was overflowing. Many sinners found hope in Jesus. They began to sing joyfully. The sound of their happy celebration reached the ears of the Pharisees, who were fasting with long faces. The Pharisees were quite upset. To them, it was unlawful to associate with public sinners. They thought it made Jesus unclean. But they were mistaken. Jesus is God. When Jesus associates with sinners, Jesus does not get dirty–sinners become holy. Nevertheless, the Pharisees said, “Why does he eat with tax collectors and ‘sinners’?” Look at verse 17. “On hearing this, Jesus said to them, ‘It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.’” When doctors see sick patients, they do not see them as worthless junks to be thrown away. They see them as human beings with disease. With treatment, they can be made whole. Likewise, when Jesus, the doctor, sees sinners, he sees holy human beings sick with sins. With treatment, they can be made whole. This is how we should see sinners.

**Third**, life in Jesus is joyful (18-22). While John’s disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees were fasting, Jesus’ disciples were eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners. It was hard for good Jews to understand and accept. They expected Jesus’ disciples to fast also. Look at verse 19. “Jesus answered, ‘How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them.’” Fasting was meant to be a means of seeking God. The disciples had God with them in Jesus. They did not need to fast, but could rejoice in the presence of Jesus. Life with Jesus is joyful, like a wedding banquet. Christian life is a wonderful relationship with Jesus, not a set of rules. It is never boring and habitual, but lively and happy. In the last two verses, Jesus explains that his ministry cannot be patched onto the Judaism that was practiced in Israel in his day. Jesus’ life-saving work is something new. It must find the freedom of expression without hindrance from established norms and traditions. Look at verse 22. “And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, he pours new wine into new wineskins.” Jesus compared the Pharisees to old wineskins. They were, in one sense, good and tasty—like old wine. But their love for God was as dead as the old wineskins. On the other hand, Jesus compared his disciples to new wine and new wineskins. They were very rough and young. But they loved Jesus. They were elastic, dynamic, adventurous and courageous in making success as well as in making many mistakes. Jesus did not hesitate to conclude, “New wine into new wineskins.”

In this passage Jesus teaches that he has authority on earth to forgive sins. In Jesus we have new life. Jesus wants us to live a dynamic new life as a powerful servant of God. Let’s accept Jesus’ grace and live with his power.