**JESUS’ AUTHORITY TO FORGIVE SINS**

June 1, 2014

Luke 5:17-26

Key Verse: 5:24 “‘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.’”

Do you want to be healed from your powerlessness? Do you want a change or are you okay with the status quo? Do you suffer from paralysis? According to Encyclopedia Britannica, paralysis means 1) complete or partial loss of function 2) loss of ability to move 3) a state of powerlessness or incapacity to act. The third definition describes the condition of spiritual paralysis. Sin makes us powerless and unable to act. We suffer from all kinds of spiritual paralysis such as shame, guilt, depression, fatalism, despair, condemnation, fear, worry, an unthankful heart, complaining spirit and human dependency. Today, Jesus wants to heal your spiritual paralysis. Jesus has authority to heal our physical sickness and our spiritual paralysis. With the power of Jesus we can get up from our failures and take up our own mat of cross and praise God with a joyful heart. Also we can follow the example of four men who had faith in Jesus and brought their friend to Jesus. Let’s carry one friend to Jesus together this summer. I pray that we may experience the power of Jesus through our faith in him.

I. ‘Friend, your sins are forgiven.” (17-20)

Look at verse 17. “One day as he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law, who had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem, were sitting there. And the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick.” We see two images of spiritual leadership in this passage. Jesus was eager to teach the word of God after healing the man with leprosy. The crowds were listening to and enjoying Jesus’ word. When the news about him spread all the more, he withdrew to lonely places and prayed more. As a result, the power of the Lord was present with him to heal the sick. But there were another group of religious leaders. They were the Pharisees and teachers of the law. They came to discredit the work of Jesus. They were not listening to Jesus’ word but were observing Jesus’ teaching to find fault. Jesus was not afraid of their threats. Jesus lived before God not before men. He was ready to demonstrate his authority as the Messiah by showing God’s power to heal. Now, let’s look at some men who brought their friend to Jesus. We learn two spiritual lessons from these friends--compassionate friendship and faith in Jesus.

Look at verses 18, 19. “Some men came carrying a paralytic on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. 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.” According to Mark 2:3, there were four people who brought the paralytic. These four men had a bold plan to bring their friend to Jesus. They came carrying their paralytic friend on a stretcher and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. But there were many obstacles to cope with. When they tried to take him into the home to lay him before Jesus, there were already too many people there lined up, waiting for Jesus’ healing. There was no room for them to enter into the house. Everybody thought that their problem was most urgent, and no one wanted to yield. But they did not give up.

Now what could they do in this desperate situation? The door was closed for them to lay their friend before Jesus. Their mission looked impossible. Did they go home in despair? Did they give up on helping this man? Did they blame the annoying crowds? Did they say “next time”? No. There was no wavering and there was no turning back: “Where there is a will, there is a way.” Just as Jesus said in Matthew 7:7b, “Knock and the door will be opened to you,” they knocked on another door. After looking around here and there, God gave them a creative idea. They exclaimed with high fives, “It is the roof. Great! We can do it. We can make a hole and lower our friend.” Once they made up their minds, they began to climb up on the roof, carrying the paralytic on his mat. Then they began to pound on the roof with a sledge hammer and made a big hole right above Jesus. They made an illegal entry into the house. The crowds could see dust in the air, and finally, the clay, wood and branches that roofs of that day were made began falling on the crowd. The owner of the house was upset. They could be arrested by the Capernaum police. They disturbed Jesus’ message. But nothing stopped them from helping this one needy friend. Their mission was to bring him to Jesus by any means. When we try to help one friend, there is always some obstacle to overcome. True love overcomes all obstacles. And God was pleased by the compassion for their paralytic friend and gave them miraculous power to carry out their mission. They didn’t care what might happen to them, if only they could help their friend. They were indeed beautiful friends to the paralytic. There is a saying, “A friend in need is a friend indeed.” People need friends to share the pains and joys of life in their pilgrim’s journey. We want to be around smart and popular people. We do not want to be a friend of nerds or dumb people. It was not easy to be a friend of this paralytic. He was only a burden to them. Four men did not expect any favors in return from this paralytic. They loved him without any calculation. Their friendship came out of their compassionate love. When we love students, we expect them to grow in return for our love. When they do not grow as we expected, we feel that they became a burden. At that time we have to remember how Jesus endured us and loved us while we were wandering in darkness. Then we can love Bible students out of compassionate love. O, Lord! Restore our love for one helpless friend.

What was Jesus’ response? Look at verse 20. “When Jesus saw their faith, he said, ‘Friends, your sins are forgiven.’” Jesus did not rebuke their illegal entry into the house. Instead, he saw their faith. They had faith in Jesus. To Jesus faith is everything. As we well know, paralysis is an incurable disease. Of course, they knew that paralysis was incurable. But they had faith that Jesus could heal him. When they had faith that Jesus could heal him, God graciously gave them the power of faith to believe all the more, and to bring him to Jesus anyhow, anyway. The paralytic was saved by the faith of his friends. There are those who have been saved by the faith of their parents. When St. Augustine was living a reckless and immoral life, his devout mother came to ask the help of a Christian bishop Ambrose. He said, “It is impossible that the child of such prayers and tears should perish.” We have to bring many paralytic friends who are powerless to come to Jesus by themselves so that they may be saved. When I was in college, I was powerless like the paralytic due to my despair. College life was a misery itself. But my friend had compassion on me and brought me to Jesus. I remember going to many prayer meetings with him even though I did not believe in Jesus. Let’s be thankful to our friends who brought us to Jesus.

In addition we cannot deny that Jesus included the paralytic as a man of faith. Theologically speaking, faith cannot be transferred to someone else, nor is the forgiveness of sins ever bestowed on account of another’s merit. We would like to transfer our faith to our Bible students and children. But each one needs their own personal faith in Jesus. According to verse 25, he had faith in Jesus’ word. His coming to Jesus was everything. Had he refused to come, his friends could not have brought him. Jesus welcomes anyone who comes to him and credits his coming as evidence of faith. This is Jesus' grace, and it is marvelous. Jesus accepted his “just coming” faith. Jesus welcomed him as a human being created in the image of God. Jesus called this paralytic “Friend,” identifying him with the compassionate friends who brought him. Jesus is the holy, almighty God yet humbled himself to the paralytic’s level so that he might bear all his sins and sorrows.

We wonder why Jesus said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven,” instead of saying, “Your paralysis is healed.” Jesus said this because sin is man’s fundamental problem. Biblically speaking, the symptoms of paralysis can be compared to the symptoms of a powerless sinner. A paralyzed man who was carried on a mat could not move his body freely, so he came to Jesus carried by four friends. He was totally powerless to do anything. He could not but depend on others to help him all the time by saying, “Give me a ride. Bring me some tooth paste. Make me a sandwich.” He needed help even going to the bathroom. Many times he complained when he did not get help from others saying, “There is no one who understands and help me.” He was a lifeless burden to others. It is good to be an encouragement and source of joy to others, but it is really no good to be a burden to others or to burden others’ hearts because of one’s powerlessness. In the past he was unable to praise God due to his physical condition. He probably was depressed a lot about his physical condition. He suffered even more by sense of rejection from God. Many paralytics are burdensome not because they are burdensome physically, but because of their sins; their sense of being no good, their dependent spirit and complaining make many people around them burdened. But many paralytics overcame themselves in Jesus and became a blessing. Instead of complaining, songs of praises come from their mouth and people around them do not feel burdened (like Joni Erickson). God made man to be a blessing, not a burden. In light of the Bible teachings, the man was a sinner because he was living against God’s purpose of creation. But Jesus declared that his sins were forgiven. When Jesus said, “Your sins are forgiven,” he meant, “Don’t be a burden; be a blessing!” When Jesus said, “Your sins are forgiven,” it meant, “You are right with God. You are no longer condemned.” This was good news to everyone. God sent Jesus to forgive sins. In order to give us the grace of forgiveness of sin, the Son of God became the Lamb of God. In order to give us the grace of forgiveness of sin, the Son of God shed his blood on the cross.

II “Get up and take your mat and go home” (21-26)

What was the reaction from the religious leaders? The Pharisees asked among themselves, “Who can forgive sins but God alone?” (21) The work of the Messiah was self-evident when Jesus healed a man with leprosy and when he was about to heal this paralytic. So the religious leaders should have realized that Jesus was the Messiah promised to come to this world to save men and women from their sins. But because of their unbelief, their pride was hurt and they became the prey of the devil. What did Jesus do with them? Despite their animosity, Jesus quietly appealed to their conscience and asked, “Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk’?” (23) We call this kind of question a “hypothetical dilemma.” Both questions are difficult to answer. Which is easier do you think? Which one is more difficult? The gist of this question is not which one is easier than the other. The main point is that both of them are hard but Jesus can do both. Jesus declared the power of forgiveness first and wanted to show that power with his actions. Jesus wanted to prove that he could give us complete healing--our spiritual sin and physical paralysis. Jesus demonstrated his authority to forgive men's sins. He backed up his word with actions.

Look at verse 24b. “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.” Jesus turns to the paralytic and gives him three commands: get up, take the mat and go home. What does it mean to get up spiritually? We were lying on our mat of despair due to our inability to act upon faith. We remained in our pathetic unbelief for a long time. Jesus is saying to us “Get up from your bed and take up your cross of mission with faith.” What was the response of the paralytic? By faith he obeyed Jesus’ command. It was a miracle of faith. Verse 25 says, “Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God.” What a great sight it was! Finally, he got up with the power of Jesus. He was never able to carry anything. Now, he was able to carry his own mat. He dreamed to have a new life. He planned to have a good job establishing a house church. The paralytic who had only bitterly complained about everybody and everything suddenly began to sing a song of praise. By his actions Jesus reveals himself as the Son of God and shows the authority he possesses. He was none other than the Messiah who came into this world to save sinners. Praise Jesus who made us get up and walk again when we were spiritual paralytics. In the past we were lying on our mat depressed and complaining. But Jesus lifted us from our darkness of sin and healed our sin sickness and called us to serve campus students. Jesus is calling us to praise his name and giving us the privilege to help many paralytic friends to walk again. There are many powerless sinners like the paralytic and they need to experience the power of Jesus’ forgiveness. I pray that God may use us to bring them to Jesus with faith.