**JESUS’ AUTHORITY TO FORGIVE SINS**

January 26, 2020

Mark 2:1-17

Key Verse 2:10a “But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.”

Today’s passage includes two events: Jesus heals a paralyzed man, and Jesus calls Levi the tax collector to be one of his disciples. By healing the paralyzed man, Jesus reveals that he has authority to forgive sins. We may think we have many problems. But from Jesus’ point of view, the real problem is a sin problem. We cannot solve this problem. But Jesus can. Jesus has authority on earth to forgive our sins. By calling Levi, Jesus declared to all people that He is the Savior of the world, Friend of sinners who came to call them to repentance.

**First**, “Son, your sins are forgiven” (1-5). Jesus returned to Capernaum after preaching throughout Galilee. People were waiting for him. They came individually and in groups to see Jesus at the house. Actually, Jesus did not have a house. It may have been Peter’s house. Jesus often borrowed from Peter: Peter’s boat, Peter’s house, Peter’s mother-in-law. Soon the house was filled until there was no room left. Latecomers gathered around windows and doorways to get a glimpse of Jesus. They remembered how Jesus had healed their migraine headaches, leprosy, and the demon-possession. They might have expected more healing. However, this time Jesus focused on preaching. Jesus believed that the word of God gives them life. Jesus believed that the word of God gives man joy and peace. Jesus believed that the word of God gives man the hope of the kingdom of God.

Look at verses 3-4. “Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, 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 by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on.” This is a beautiful story of friendship. The love of the four friends went beyond human love. It was mixed with hope; hope in Jesus who could cure their friend. They were certain that if they just got their friend to Jesus, he would be healed. So when they confronted an obstacle–the crowd–they did not give up. They climbed up on the roof and dug a hole and let their friend down in front of Jesus. The owner might have called 911 to report “breaking and entering.” Bystanders who were struck by falling debris might have threatened to sue them for damages. Nevertheless, these men took the risk and helped their helpless friend. We all need friends like this. Ecclesiastes 4:10 says, “If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls down and has no one to help him up!.” We all have such a friend. He is Jesus Christ. Jesus told his disciples in John 15:13, “Greater love has no one than this: that he lay down his life for his friends.” We should spend time with our friend Jesus every day, singing, “What a friend we have in Jesus!” We also should learn to be true friends for others. True friends bring others to Jesus in their time of need.

Look at verse 5. “When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven.’” This is somewhat surprising. Jesus did not say, “Your paralysis is healed.” Jesus said, “Your sins are forgiven.” To Jesus, the sin problem was most urgent. We must accept this truth even if we don’t understand it. Most fallen men think some other problem is the most urgent: finances, jobs, boyfriends and girlfriends, the environment. But to Jesus the sin problem is most urgent. In one sense, sin is like paralysis. God made man in the image of God to be a ruler over God’s world, working hard and worshiping God. God made man to grow in the image of God and bear much fruit. But sin makes man powerless, even to take care of himself. Paralyzed sinners do not do their basic duty; homework, washing dishes, maintaining family relationships. When they face the consequences of their sin, they make excuses and blame others. They often blame God. They never thank God, and they never glorify God (Ro 1:21). 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. Some have mental paralysis. 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. Some have paralyzed lips. They never say, ‘Thank you,” or “Praise God.”

Jesus said to the paralyzed man, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” The word “forgiven” comes from the Greek word aphiémi. This means to cancel a debt that is due. This man had a huge debt of sin that demanded his lifeblood as payment. Jesus cancelled this debt with one statement. It was the declaration of forgiveness by the holy God toward a sinner. This restored the man’s relationship with God and made him a child of God. Jesus gave us this authority to forgive sins. John 20:23 says, “If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.” Also Matthew 6:14-15 says, “For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.” Jesus gave his authority to forgive sins to us. He anointed us as his ambassadors on earth to bring reconciliation with God and with one another. Sin destroys relationship. God wants to restore a broken relationship so that we may live in a loving community. The Greek word 'aphiemi ' also means 'to let go' or 'give up'. We generally find it hard to let go because we have been offended and we like to hold on to our hurts as some kind of payback. Many times holding grudges against someone makes us physically sick. It is also not a good feeling that someone is holding a grudge against us. The ultimate Forgiver is Jesus Christ. But he gave his authority to forgive sins to us as his ambassadors on earth to restore the relationship among men.

**Second**, Jesus demonstrates his power to forgive sins (6-12). Look at verses 6-7. “Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, ‘Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?’” The teachers of the law did not see Jesus’ compassion on the paralyzed man. They could not see the man’s sins forgiven, and so they would not believe that Jesus is God. They were the leaders of Israel. Their poisonous resistance toward Jesus was a great hindrance to spreading the good news of the kingdom. Without hesitation, Jesus decided to confront them. Look at verses 10-12a. “‘But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.’ He said to the man, ‘I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.’ He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all.” Jesus made a paralyzed man get up and walk. In this way, Jesus demonstrated his power to forgive sins. Jesus proved that he has “authority on earth to forgive sins,” by the healing the paralyzed man. Jesus solves our sin problem tangibly. Jesus wants us to have victory over sin here and now. Jesus wants to bring his kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

Look at verse 12b. “This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, ‘We have never seen anything like this.’” Ordinary people recognized God in Jesus and praised God. They saw something new, something that had never happened before. To fallen man, life is a repetition of cycles that end in failure and death. There is nothing exciting and nothing new. But in Jesus Christ, there is something new and life-giving and dramatic and exciting. Especially, when a paralyzed sinner is healed by Jesus, he becomes a new creation. He changes the world into a new world, and encourages all people who witness it.

**Third**, Jesus called Levi to follow him (13-17). Jesus had begun a new work. The world, which had long been ruled by sin and Satan, was becoming the kingdom of God. According to verse 13, Jesus continued his teaching ministry beside the lake. Many people came to him and tasted freedom from sin and new life in Jesus. 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. He became St. Matthew who wrote the gospel of 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 took money from his people and gave it to the Romans, their enemy. So they were regarded as public sinners along with adulterers, robbers, prostitutes and such. 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. His wife was despised in the grocery store. His children were despised in school. Any young man who decided to be a tax collector had to think long and hard and make a clear decision to do so. Once it was made, there could be no turning back. Levi had made such a decision. Though it may have been unintentional, Levi had turned his back on God. He did not seek God’s purpose for his life. Levi also turned his back on his suffering people. Levi hardened his heart to live selfishly, seeking money first for his own survival and pleasure. This seemed to be smart. But in doing so he lost his relationship with God and with his people. When Levi made this decision, 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. In that society, once a tax collector, forever tax collector.

When Jesus saw Levi sitting at the tax collector’s booth, Jesus said to him, “Follow me.” Jesus invited Levi to be his disciple. At the time, Jesus’ ministry was successful and prosperous. Letting Levi follow him meant risking alienation of mainstream Jews. Still, Jesus called Levi to follow him. 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. 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 only he had the opportunity. Most likely, he had heard about Jesus’ message of forgiveness and found hope in Jesus. He believed that Jesus could forgive his sins and give him a new beginning. He saw the hope that even though in that society, he would remain forever as an outcast, in Jesus’ kingdom, he would be a new creation.

When Jesus called, Levi got up and followed. Levi became the fifth disciple of Jesus according to Mark’s gospel. Like the others, he made an immediate decision to accept Jesus’ call and committed his life to Jesus. 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 a sick person, they do not think that he is useless. Doctors see the person and the disease separately. Doctors believe that if the disease is dealt with, the person will be healed and become useful. To doctors, it is not the person, but the disease that is the problem. Likewise, Jesus sees sinners like a spiritual doctor. Jesus distinguishes between sin and sin-sick people. Jesus sees that if only sin can be cured, the person can be healthy and become useful. So Jesus treats sinners with great hope, deep understanding and tender care, like a doctor who wants to heal them. Each of us is one kind of sinner—like the paralyzed man or like the tax collector. Without Jesus we cannot but live as sinners like the paralyzed man. Without Jesus we cannot but live as sinners like the tax collector. Men are helpless without Jesus. Without Jesus we are all sinsick. In the past I was like the paralyzed man. My sin of having a dead hope of becoming a great scientist made me despair and lived with “I can’t” attitude. My mind became blank due to despair. I had no hope. I had no strength to study. But God called me by his grace and helped me to work hard for his kingdom.

In this passage Jesus teaches that he has authority on earth to forgive sins. Jesus gave that authority to us as ambassadors on earth so that we may bring reconciliation to God and with one another and live in a loving community.

Big Idea: Jesus gave his authority to forgive sins to us, his ambassadors on earth.