

JESUS' POWER TO FORGIVE SINS

Mark 2:1-22

Key Verse: 2:10

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

Today's passage includes two events: Jesus heals a paralytic, and Jesus calls Levi the tax collector to be one of his disciples. By healing a paralytic, Jesus reveals that he has power to forgive sins. By calling a man named Levi, Jesus reveals that he came to call sinners, not the righteous. Jesus' calling Levi the tax collector reveals that any kind of wretched person can be recreated into a most useful person in the world. In this passage, we want to learn mainly about Jesus' power to forgive man's sins.

I. Jesus heals a paralytic (1-12)

First, they had faith in Jesus (1-9). Jesus spent a good many days for his evangelistic work in nearby villages. A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home (1). So many gathered at the house that there was no room left, not even outside the door. What did Jesus do for them? Jesus immediately taught the word of life (2). 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 Spirit of God to overcome the world and be set free from the bondage to sin (Jn 8:31,32).

There were five men. They were very dear to each other. Most probably, one of them had a stroke and he became a paralytic. His four friends felt as if they had a stroke. They had great compassion for him. But they were utterly helpless. One day they heard the news that Jesus had come to Capernaum. They cried out, "Yeah, that's it!" Suddenly they were strongly convinced that their paralytic friend would get well. While Jesus was preaching, some men came, bringing to him a paralytic, carried by four of them. To get him to Jesus, they pushed and waded through the crowd until they came near. Still, they could not get him to Jesus. People had already crammed around Jesus for healing. Each thought that his or her case was most urgent. No one wanted to concede. But where there was a will, there was a way. To the four friends, a beautiful inspiration arose, as the sun rises in the east. What did they do next? 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 offended many people. The owner of the house might have called the police. Other patients who lined up surrounded them to punish them. But to the friends, it did not matter what might happen to them. They say that a friend in need is a friend indeed. They were indeed beautiful friends to the paralytic. Their compassionate hearts toward him were flaring intensely, so intensely that they could not stop themselves from climbing up and digging a hole through the central part of another's roof and lowering the paralytic in front of Jesus. They brought him to Jesus. Though paralysis was known to be incurable, it did not matter to them. They brought this man to Jesus believing that Jesus would make him whole. They had a great faith in Jesus' healing power. May God give this kind of faith to each of us.

This reminds us of a beautiful story about friendship between David and Jonathan. When King Saul, out of jealousy, intended to destroy David, Jonathan promised to help him at the cost of his life. And Jonathan did as he had promised (1Sa 20:41,42). In the matter of time, David heard of Jonathan's death at war. He mourned, saying, "I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother; you were very dear to me. Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women" (2Sa 1:26). Romeo's love for Juliet was more than his life. So in the end he died for her. But King David valued Jonathan's love more than the love of any woman in the world. Jesus said to his disciples regarding friendship, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" (Jn 15:13). These days we can hardly see friendship among men. But it is good for us to make friends among men, as our Lord made friends with us.

Let's think for a moment about why the paralytic is comparable to a representative sinner. We don't know how he became a paralytic. Maybe he had a stroke that left him without the use of his arms and legs. He could not move, so he could not but depend on others to help him all the time. He was a lifetime burden to others. The paralytic was the kind of person the world would be better off without. In the Bible, a paralytic is regarded as a representative sinner, for he is powerless to do anything. He is also a burden to others all the time, instead of being a blessing. Like paralysis, sin makes man powerless (Ro 5:6). Sin makes man lazy. Sin deprives man of holy desires. On the other hand, sin fills a man with sinful desires like growing weeds. There are many spiritual paralytics. One boy couldn't overcome his lustful desire. He gave up his medical studies and died of one-sided love at the age of 21.

What did Jesus do for the paralytic? First, Jesus called him "son." Look at verse 5. "When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven.'" To people's eyes, this paralytic was a source of anguish because this

man was burdensome and smelly to everyone he met. But to Jesus, he was like one of his own sons. To Jesus, he was too pitiful even to look at. Jesus hoped that he would be fully restored. Jesus hoped that he would be a hard-working man. Jesus hoped that he would be a blessing to others instead of being a burden. So Jesus said to him, "Son." It meant, "My son, you will be all right." Second, Jesus said, "Your sins are forgiven." Jesus knew this man needed to be healed of his paralysis. But Jesus did not think that paralysis was his fundamental problem; Jesus knew it was sin that made him paralyzed. Jesus knew it was sin that made him utterly powerless. Jesus wanted to solve his root problem, that is, his sin problem. So Jesus said, "Your sins are forgiven."

As Jesus' work grew and grew, the religious leaders sent out a group of people to check up on Jesus, and they were already sitting there. When they heard Jesus say, "Your sins are forgiven," they thought to themselves, "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming!" (7; Lev 24:16) They did not see Jesus' compassion on the paralytic. They did not see Jesus' power to heal the paralytic. They did not see that Jesus is the Messiah promised to come. They were spiritually blind. They were so jealous that they only wanted to kill Jesus.

Jesus knew that they did not know about man's fundamental problem, that is, the sin problem. So he said in 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...."

Second. Jesus demonstrates his power to forgive sins (10-12). The environment was very hostile. If Jesus wanted to help this man further, he had to risk his life. But Jesus decided to demonstrate his power to forgive the man's sins (10). Jesus looked around at the people for a while, and then turned his attention to the paralytic and said, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." (11) Look at verse 12a. "He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all." What a great sight! Historically, people did not even know what sin was, though they suffered endlessly because of sin. Even if they knew what sin was, they were helpless to do anything except worship the moon or the stars or a rock or pieces of wood. In history, Jesus is the only one who has power to forgive sins. So Jesus wants us to come to him to receive the forgiveness of sins. When the people of Capernaum saw the paralytic pick up his mat and walk, they marveled and said, "We have never seen anything like this!" (12b) People marveled at Jesus' power to forgive man's sins. Jesus' declaration of his power to forgive man's sin is good news of great joy for all mankind.

II. Jesus calls Levi the tax collector (13-17)

First. Jesus saw in him the greatness of God. In this part, Jesus calls another kind of representative sinner, Levi the tax collector. 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. Levi lived in Capernaum, a trade center in Palestine. He lived as one of the subjugated people of the Roman Empire. But he was not crushed by the hard situation of the world under Roman rule. Rather, he overcame the adverse situation and became a tax collector. If the paralytic was a powerless sinner, Levi was a selfish sinner.

Levi thought that money would make him happy. And he made some money. But in the course of making money he became a person who was called a public sinner, one who could do anything if only he could make money. In short, Levi became a selfish man. These days selfishness is widely condoned. The devil has deceived many as if selfishness is the truth in this capitalistic society. But in God's world, selfish people are comparable to men with leprosy, because they are as harmful to others as a man with leprosy. Selfishness is as

contagious as leprosy.

What happened to this selfish person? Levi aspired to the conquest of happiness. Contrary to his wishes, he was captured by the power of sin and death. Levi had some money, but he was very fearful under the shadow of death. These days many young people cannot go to bed early because they are afraid of nightmares. To most young people, going to bed late at night and getting up late seems to have become a part of American culture. Probably Levi was an American. How did Jesus help him?

To people's eyes, Levi was too dirty to look at. When we look at selfish people, we are greatly hurt because they are as dirty as a man with leprosy. Selfish people make others very sick; above all, they cannot please God. But we must learn that Jesus called Levi as one of his disciples. Jesus saw the greatness of God in him, because he was created in the image of God. To people's eyes, Levi looked like a leper who should be avoided. But Jesus invited him by saying, "Follow me." It was to restore his disfigured inner man with a new image of God. To people's eyes, Levi was so selfish and dirty that they never wanted to see him again. If they saw him by chance, they felt sick to their stomach. But Jesus did not see him like that; Jesus saw the greatness of God in him.

Second, Jesus invited him to be one of his disciples. When Jesus said, "Follow me," he meant, "Come and learn of me and be my disciple." Levi was a man of ability, but it was misused. When Jesus called him by saying, "Follow me," Jesus wanted to help him until he became a new man and the best man in the world. Later, this man recorded Jesus' Sermon on the Mount: "You are the light of the world" (Mt 5:14a).

Third, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (15-17). What happened when Levi met Jesus? He experienced heavenly joy in his heart. So, for the first time, he bought many bags of groceries and prepared a great dinner. It was the expression of his thanksgiving to Jesus; it was the expression of his spiritual joy. Levi called his tax collector friends, Jesus, and his disciples, and they all ate dinner together joyfully, munching and crunching (15). Meanwhile, the teachers of the law saw Jesus eating with the "sinners" and tax collectors. They asked his disciples, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" (16) These religious men despised and rejected Jesus as one of the public sinners because he ate with persons who were branded as public sinners. Because of their fixed ideas, the teachers of the law were useless to God.

What did Jesus say to them? 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.'" This reveals that Jesus came to call sinners, not the righteous. Each of us is one kind of sinner--like the paralytic or like the tax collector. Without Jesus we cannot but live as sinners like paralytics. Without Jesus we cannot but live as sinners like the tax collector. Men are helpless without Jesus. Without Jesus we are all sinsick. Jesus did not come to call the righteous, but sinners. Praise Jesus!

III. Old wineskins and new wineskins (18-22)

The teachers of the law did not understand why Jesus was mingling with sinners. They were bigoted and legalistic. They attacked Jesus with a legalistic question: "How is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?" (18) Originally, the practice of fasting began with a good motive. But in Jesus' time, fasting was no more than a show to be pious.

What did Jesus answer? 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.'" Jesus answered that the time of law has passed and that the time of grace has come. Not only so, but also, the Messiah has come to the world to save men from their sins. Where Jesus is, there is the kingdom of God. Jesus is joy to all men. So the Pharisees were asking a totally useless question. Jesus compared his disciples to the guests of the bridegroom at a wedding feast in the heavenly kingdom, and he himself to the bridegroom. So they ate a lot and rejoiced.

When Jesus saw the teachers of the law, they were as useless as a junkyard car. So Jesus said in verse 21, "No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse." As long as one is legalistic, he is useless.

Jesus gave another illustration. 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. Thus, they loved God with all their strength. Also, they were elastic, dynamic, explosive, 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 we learn that Jesus helped a paralytic and Levi the tax collector. One was a burdensome sinner, the other a selfish sinner. Most of all, we learn that Jesus has power to forgive man's sins. We must love Jesus with all our hearts and become new wineskins.