

Jesus' Authority to Forgive Sins

Luke 5:12-26

Key Verse: 5:24

by Kevin Albright

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."

In this Bible passage Jesus performs two miracles: first, Jesus cleanses a man with leprosy; second, Jesus enables a paralytic to walk. What is a miracle? It is a marvelous event caused by God. Besides the two obvious miracles already mentioned, there is a third unseen miracle: Jesus forgives the sins of the paralyzed man. Only God can forgive sins. The forgiveness of sins is the greatest miracle of all. As we study these two events, let's learn of Jesus--his compassion and his power. Let's come to Jesus in faith. Not only that, let's also bring others to Jesus.

1. Jesus cleanses a man with leprosy (12-16)

First, a diseased man came boldly and humbly to Jesus.

Look at verse 12a. "While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy." In the last event, Jesus went to Simon by stepping in to his boat. But here, this man with leprosy came along and saw Jesus. Luke describes him as 'a man covered with leprosy.' His skin disease was in an advanced stage, all over his body. He must have looked hideous and repulsive. In a Jewish community, people with skin diseases were required to be quarantined away from society. Leviticus 13 and 14 says that a person with infectious skin diseases had to be isolated, examined by a priest and declared "clean" before being allowed to return to normal living in society. Also, when such a man came out in public, he was required to cover his mouth and announce, "Unclean!" to warn others, so they would not become unclean by touching him. This man was in an isolated condition, cut off from others. He must have felt cursed by God.

Sin is like leprosy. Both disfigure a person's wholesome image. As leprosy makes the body repulsive, smelly and unclean, so does sin affect the soul. Especially, sin makes one unclean before God. In Mark 7:1-23, Jesus described things that come from within a person's heart that make one unclean: evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly."

Look at verse 12b. "When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the ground and begged him, 'Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.'" He called Jesus "Lord." This was the same title Simon Peter called Jesus after the miraculous catch of fish. The man fell with his face down and begged Jesus. This shows that he was humble. He didn't proudly insist that Jesus do something for him. He came as an unclean man, unworthy to receive anything from the Lord. At the same time, he truly believed that Jesus is the Lord, who could cleanse him. He said, "you can make me clean." He knew that Jesus had power to make him clean.

Think about what was involved for this man to come to Jesus and appeal to him openly. Already noted was that he was an unclean outcast in the community. Furthermore, if he compared himself with others, he felt inferior, embarrassed and even ashamed of his abnormality. But he overcame others' opinions of him and appealed to Jesus in public. There was one more element he overcame in coming to Jesus: he wasn't sure Jesus would want to heal him. He said, "Lord, if you are willing..." It meant, "If you want or choose to..." He was not sure or confident in himself, but he was confident of what Jesus could do. He didn't demand that Jesus do this for him. He left the decision entirely up to Jesus. In spite of many hindrances, both from himself and from others, he came to Jesus. He came personally to Jesus. He came boldly to Jesus. He came humbly to Jesus. We too, must each come personally, boldly and humbly to Jesus and make our appeal.

Second, Jesus is willing to cleanse us.

If this man saw you and asked you for something, how would you respond? I think that most if not all of us would grimace and back away from him. Let's read verse 13 together. "Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. 'I am willing,' he said. 'Be clean!' And immediately the leprosy left him." Jesus did a shocking thing: he intentionally touched the man. Jesus was not afraid of becoming ritually unclean. Jesus was not afraid of contracting the man's disease. Jesus was ready to take this man's disease upon himself. Jesus was

willing to give his life for this man. Jesus' touch is full of compassion. In addition to touching the man, Jesus said, "I am willing." Jesus' words did not stop there. Jesus not only had compassion. Jesus also had power. Jesus had power to do what the man begged him to do: to make him clean. Jesus pronounced: "Be clean!" And immediately, the leprosy left him.

We are all sick like lepers, due to our sins. We are covered with sin from head to toe. There is no psychology or medicine that can heal us. But Jesus can make us clean. Jesus took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows and diseases (Isa 53:4; Mt 8:17). Jesus made us clean by his substitutionary death for us. Peter later wrote, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed." (1Pe 2:24; Isa 53:4-5) How can one receive this cleansing by Jesus? It is by recognizing and confessing one's own sinsickness and then appealing to Jesus in humble and bold faith, like the leprous man: "Lord Jesus, if you are willing, you can make me clean." Jesus promises in John 6:37, "whoever comes to me I will never drive away." Whenever a person comes to Jesus in bold and humble faith, Jesus promises, "I am willing. Be clean!"

Have you been to Jesus for the cleansing power? One person lived like a cave dweller, isolated from others. He had an ungodly habit that made him feel dirty. But he had a rendezvous with Jesus and was cleansed from his guilt and shame. This week millions of people all over the world mourned the death of a very popular, yet strange and controversial musical superstar, Michael Jackson. When I first came to UBF worship services in the fall of 1983, I was a big fan of MJ and pop music. So I was surprised when the co-founder of UBF, Dr. Samuel Lee, called this superstar "a despaired musician." Actually, one writer said that he often described himself as "the loneliest person in the world." Also, when I honestly analyzed the influence of pop music on my life, it made me pleasure-seeking, vain and ungodly. I also had a foul mouth and a lewd mind. It was in this dirty condition that I began Bible study. Through Bible study, I experienced many times a pure joy and the cleansing power of God's word. God also cleansed my gutter mouth and replaced my love of pop music with Christian music. How about you? Can you testify to his cleansing in your life?

After cleansing the man with leprosy, Jesus ordered him, "Don't tell anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them." Jesus commanded

him not to go and tell, but to go and show the priest. Jesus did not want him to advertise his healing. Jesus did not want people to come to him for worldly benefits but for healing in their souls. Jesus did not want his healing ministry to be abused or misunderstood. Jesus told him to offer the required sacrifices for his cleansing, written in Leviticus 14. Then the priest would pronounce him 'clean' and he could interact freely in the community. This would be a testimony both to the priests and the people. Jesus showed that he lived in submission to God's Law. Still, the news about Jesus spread all the more, and crowds of people came to hear him and be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places for prayer.

2. Jesus empowers a paralytic to walk (17-26)

First, they brought him to Jesus.

The next event begins with Jesus teaching one day in a crowded home. Mark's gospel places this event in Capernaum, which became Jesus' home base for his ministry. It might have been Simon Peter's home. For the first time, Luke introduces the Pharisees and teachers of the law, who would become Jesus' chief critics and enemies. Jesus had already experienced opposition from his hometown people of Nazareth, who wanted to kill Jesus for his scathing teaching. From here on, almost continuously and unanimously, the Pharisees and religious teachers of the law try to find fault with Jesus, rather than being open to the message and ministry of God in Jesus. In this case, they came from all over Galilee and Judea. Luke adds, "And the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick." A confrontation was brewing, but also a powerful healing.

Look at verse 18. "Some men came carrying a paralytic on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus." Like the man with leprosy, these men also came to Jesus with a serious problem. But this problem was not their own. They were carrying a paralyzed man on a mat. The man couldn't walk for himself. So he was being carried, actually by four men. Perhaps these men were his high school or college buddies. Maybe they were brothers or neighbors or colleagues from work. Whoever they were, they took this paralytic's problem personally as their own. They teamed up together to bring their helpless friend to Jesus.

But there was a problem. The house was jam packed with people and they couldn't get through the crowd to take him to Jesus. At this point, they could've waited until the crowd dispersed or decided to come back another day or just given up. But they did not give up so easily. Finally, they found a way to get their friend to Jesus, albeit unconventional. They decided to make a way, through the roof! They lowered their paralyzed friend through the tiles of the roof into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus.

Consider people's expected reactions to this. The homeowner must have yelled at them, called the police and threatened to sue them for property damages. And surely they had to repair or pay for damages. But this did not stop them from bringing their friend to Jesus. Then there was the crowd. Probably the people complained, "Hey, we got here first!" They were rude to cut in line like this. This also did not stop them. Not only that, they disrupted Jesus' teaching with their acrobatic feat of lowering the man on his mat from the ceiling to the floor, like a Spiderman. These men were determined to get their friend to Jesus. They were urgent and persistent.

Now look at verse 20. "When Jesus saw their faith, he said, 'Friend, your sins are forgiven.'" Jesus did not see that the men were rude or disruptive or thoughtless. Rather, Jesus saw their action as faith. Jesus saw their hearts of love to bring their helpless friend to Jesus. While others got angry, Jesus smiled at these men and blessed their faith. We learn from these men, simply speaking, to bring others to Jesus with our faith. How can we bring them to Jesus? We can bring them through prayer. But that is not enough. We can also call them, email them, visit them, give them a ride, and bring them to a Christian gathering. One missionary visited a student again and again to bring him to Bible study. One time, the student turned the lights off in the house to pretend not to be home. Another time, he threatened to call the police. But the missionary did not become afraid and give up. God blessed the missionary's faith and this young man was brought to Christ. He is still living for Christ. Please ask yourself: Do I really care about someone else's problem? Without love, we are just hired hands. But with love and faith, Jesus is pleased to do his work.

Second, "your sins are forgiven." These are the most surprising words in this passage. Jesus said to the paralytic something that no one there could have imagined or expected. He said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven." Why did Jesus say this, when it was obvious that what this man needed was healing in his legs?

There are two fundamental reasons Jesus said this.

In the first place, Jesus said, "your sins are forgiven," because sin is the most urgent, serious ailment of everyone on earth. This man looked like he needed working legs more than anything else. That's not what Jesus thought. It may be that this man's sins are what caused him to become paralyzed. That is possible, but not necessary to the story. Perhaps the man was born a paralytic. Perhaps his paralysis had been caused by an accident. But his paralysis was not the urgent matter. It was his sins. Today, some think the economy is our most urgent problem, or peace in the Middle East. To Jesus, sin is our most serious and urgent problem, personally, nationally and globally.

Sin can make us like a paralytic. A paralytic is totally dependent on others. He cannot walk for himself. He is a constant burden to his caregiver. In a word, he is powerless. Sin makes us powerless. Bible scholars note that there are two types of sin: sins of commission and sins of omission. Said another way: we sin when we commit evil, or when we omit doing good. James 4:17 says, "Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins." This paralytic represents the second category of sinners. He couldn't do much good. Often times, though we are able-bodied and healthy, we easily fall into sins of laziness or indifference. We become paralyzed to do good and we sleep or watch television or waste time in some other petty way. And we like to justify ourselves saying things like, "Oh, it won't make any difference anyway if I try to help someone, so why bother?" Things that easily make a person a spiritual paralytic are fatalism, pessimism, complaining and meaninglessness. Spiritual paralytics are usually burdensome and childish.

How can we get out of our spiritual paralysis? Many hope a self-help psychology book will do the trick. But that is about as effective as aspirin is in curing cancer. Neither can we get out of our sins by our own strength or effort. Still, there is a way out of our sins. Romans 9:16 tells us, "It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy."

In the second place, Jesus said, "your sins are forgiven," because he came to give us the forgiveness of sins. In history, no reputable person ever pronounced the forgiveness of sins on his own authority. Only Jesus pronounced, "Your sins are forgiven." Only Jesus has the power and

authority to forgive our sins. He was given the name "Jesus" which means, "the Lord saves," because "he will save his people from their sins." (Mt 1:21) 1 John 3:4 says, "But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins." Why do we need the forgiveness of sins? When our sins are forgiven, our consciences are free. When our sins are forgiven, we have a place in God's family. When our sins are forgiven, we have eternal life in God's kingdom through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Third, "get up and walk."

At Jesus' pronouncement, "Your sins are forgiven," his critics became wide-eyed and thought, "Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy?" And they rightly concluded, "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" Indeed, Jesus' pronouncement, "Your sins are forgiven," is one of the clearest proofs that Jesus is divine.

Jesus knew their thoughts 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'?" Actually, it may be easier for a man to say, "Your sins are forgiven," because he doesn't have to give any visible proof that it actually happened. To say, "Get up and walk" is more difficult since it must be verified by eyewitnesses. In any case, either forgiving sins or enabling a paralytic to walk are impossible things for man to do.

Let's read verse 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.'" If Jesus could show them the visible miracle of enabling the man to walk, then they should also believe that he has authority to do the invisible miracle of forgiving the man's sins.

What happened? Immediately the man stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. Before, the mat carried him. Now, he carried the mat. He was no longer a man on a mat. The mat he now carried was vivid proof of Jesus' grace and healing power in his life. The man was no longer powerless. He had power in his legs. He praised God. And so did the people saying, "We have seen remarkable things today."

Without Christ, we are powerless in our sins. Romans 5:6 describes this well: "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ

died for the ungodly." Due to our sins, we were all powerless and ungodly. But through faith in Christ, we are no longer powerless and helpless. Through faith in Christ and by his grace, we have power from the Holy Spirit to live for Christ, as children of God. John 1:12 can be translated as follows: "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the power to become children of God." Paul wrote of this power in 2 Timothy 1:7, "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love, and of self discipline." Jesus gives us power to get out of a guilty conscience. Jesus gives us power to forgive others. Jesus empowers us to get out of sin and live a holy life.

So many people can testify to Jesus' changing power in their lives. Here is one example. One woman grew up in a deep sense of defeat and inferiority because of her poor school grades. She became rebellious in school and at home, complaining to God. She didn't know her purpose of life and had no hope or meaning. In her emptiness, she spent over 12 hours a day sleeping and many hours watching TV to escape reality. Then, at age 14, she began an early morning prayer meeting with her godly parents. She felt Jesus' love. She learned that God had a clear and beautiful plan for her. This fact changed her life. Jesus brought her out of her defeat and inferiority through Mark 9:23, "If you can?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for him who believes." This word changed her from a rebellious, poor student to an honor student. Yesterday she established a blessed family in Christ.

In summary, Jesus is willing to cleanse us of our sins. Not only is he willing, Jesus is also able to do it. Ultimately, Jesus took away our sins through his blood shed on the cross. Now, anyone who comes to him in repentance and faith will receive cleansing and power from Jesus. Let's come to Jesus in bold and humble faith in him. May Jesus touch you, heal you and forgive you as you do so. Let's also bring others to Jesus through Bible study, for Jesus is the only one who has power and authority to forgive our sins.