

“FRIEND, YOUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN”

Luke 5:12-26

Key Verse: 5:20

“When Jesus saw their faith, he said, ‘Friend, your sins are forgiven.’”

Christians who study the Bible deeply tend to think about everything from a spiritual perspective. In this materialistic, rationalistic society, it is very important to keep a spiritual perspective. However, as we do so, we can easily diminish the importance of other aspects of life: the physical, mental and emotional. Unconsciously, we can begin to see everything with a dualistic mindset that separates the spiritual and the material. We value spiritual activities and tend to dismiss physical activities like exercise. However, we find that Jesus restores the whole person. He did not only die on the cross for our sins. He cared for the practical needs of people: healing the sick, casting out demons, teaching the word of God. Jesus wants us to live a healthy life physically, mentally and emotionally, as well as spiritually. In today’s passage Jesus cleanses a leper and heals a paralyzed man. In doing so, Jesus proclaims his authority to forgive sins. This Jesus is willing to cleanse us, heal us and forgive our sins. This Jesus restores our whole being and enables us to live a healthy life. Let’s see how Jesus cares for people.

First, Jesus cleanses a man with leprosy (12-16). While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along. Luke, as a physician, described the man as **“covered with leprosy”** (12a). It was not just one part of his body, but his whole body that was contaminated. He might have been partially blind, limping, missing a nostril, and generally hideous in appearance. People are very sensitive about their appearance. I know one teenager who did not want to go to school because he had a pimple was afraid of being ridiculed. However, this man’s issue was more than a matter of appearance. Jews thought that lepers were unclean based on the law. They were considered cursed by God, and anyone who had contact with them would also become unclean. So they were strictly isolated. This practice was rooted in their understanding of holiness. God said, **“Be holy because I am holy”** (Lev 11:44-45; 19:2; et al.). He taught them to separate themselves from anything unclean.

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Ceremonial laws dealing with clean and unclean do not apply to us. But holiness is always vital to God’s people. Apostle Peter admonished the early Christians, **“As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy’”** (1Pe 1:14-16). We are commanded to live holy lives as God’s children. The question is, how can we be holy? Some people think of a holy life as separated from everything secular, like a monk in a monastery in the desert. But this is not the Biblical meaning of a holy life. A holy life is one in which we are aware of God and live before him based on his word. Because we are aware of God we shun evil and do good. Holiness does not come through ceremony, or by taking a shower every day. Holiness is a matter of our hearts. Jesus taught that it is not something outside that makes us unclean. Rather, it is what comes out of a person’s heart that defiles them: evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly (Mk 7:21-22). The prophet Jeremiah said, **“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure”** (Jer 17:9). Because this evil of sin is in our hearts, it contaminates our thoughts, words, desires and actions. When we think about ourselves honestly, no one can say, “I’m clean. I’m good. I’m okay.” Ecclesiastes 7:20 says, **“Indeed, there is no one on earth who is righteous, no one who does what is right and never sins.”** Sin within us makes us unclean in the sight of God and stains our consciences with guilt and shame. It breaks our relationships with others. In that respect, we all feel unclean and isolated like this man with leprosy. How can we be clean? Let’s learn how this man with leprosy was cleansed.

It was not easy for him to come to Jesus. He had to overcome many barriers within and without. According to Leviticus, it was illegal for him to contact clean people. By coming to Jesus he was breaking the law. If he was caught, he could be stoned. Fear and doubt must have tugged at his heart, pressing him to give up. His mind conjured up images of crowds chastising him and throwing rocks at him. He wondered if Jesus would accept such a dirty, hideous creature as he. We, too, wonder if Jesus will accept us because we feel so dirty due to our sins. Anyway, overcoming all barriers, the man came to Jesus by faith. When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the ground

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and begged him, **“Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean”** (12b). Though the man was desperate, he was not demanding. He deeply acknowledged that Jesus is Lord. He respected Jesus’ sovereignty in making a decision about him. He totally depended on Jesus’ mercy and made his request humbly, kneeling down with his face to the ground. This is faith. We, too, need to come to Jesus with this faith. Faith is not theoretical knowledge, but assurance that if we come to Jesus, everything will be okay. Faith gives us real courage and power to come to Jesus.

Jesus must have been moved by the man’s faith. He reached out his hand and touched the man, saying, **“I am willing. Be clean!”** And immediately the leprosy left him (13). Reaching out his hand to touch the man reveals Jesus’ great compassion. Jesus deeply understood this man. All other people had shunned him. But Jesus heard the cry of his soul even more than the anguish of his words. Jesus knew that his inner suffering from the wounds of rejection was even more excruciating than his bodily pain. Jesus wanted to heal his inner wounds as well as his body. By first touching the man, he communicated deep acceptance of him. Then Jesus said, **“I am willing.”** Jesus is not burdened by sick people who come to him for healing. Jesus is willing to heal and restore us. Jesus does not want us to remain ugly or dirty, but to become beautiful and healthy. Jesus deeply desires to restore God’s image in us and a right relationship with him. For this, it is vital that our consciences be cleansed. We cannot buy a clean conscience with money. Neither drugs nor good deeds nor penance can cleanse our consciences. Only Jesus’ blood can cleanse our consciences. That is why Jesus shed his blood for us. Hebrews 9:14 says, **“How much more, then, will the blood of Christ...cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!”**

After Jesus cleansed the leprosy, the man became a new person. All of his inner wounds were healed. His skin was healthy and clean and his handsomeness was fully restored. He felt fresh and free. But Jesus did not stop there. Jesus sent him to the priest and told him to offer the sacrifices for cleansing that Moses commanded (14). This was necessary for him to re-enter society as a normal man. In this way, Jesus restored his community life, along with his body, mind and spirit. Now he could study in a good college. He

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could get a proper job. He could marry and have children. His future looked bright and beautiful. The news about Jesus spread all the more. Crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses (15). Jesus was becoming very popular. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed (16). We learn from Jesus the importance of quiet time with God, even in the midst of a very vibrant ministry.

Second, Jesus demonstrates his authority to forgive sins by healing a paralytic (17-26). Jesus’ ministry caught the attention of the religious leaders. Pharisees and teachers of the law from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem appeared before Jesus as he was teaching (17a). Perhaps they were sitting in the front row, with their arms crossed, leaning back, and scowling. But Jesus was not daunted at all. He was full of the power of the Lord to heal the sick (17b). The atmosphere was tense. Then something happened to break the tension. Some men came, carrying a paralyzed man on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus (18). But it was hard. There was no special handicapped access, and no one cooperated, because each one had their own serious problem. There seemed to be no way to get this man to Jesus. But there is a saying, “If you cannot find a way, make a way!” With this spirit, they made a way. 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 (19). These men are impressive. They were creative, persistent and bold. They worked together as a team, keeping sight of a common goal. How could they do this? According to Jesus, it was by faith. They believed that Jesus would heal their friend and end his suffering. They also loved their friend. Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres. Love never fails (1Co 13:7-8a). When we have faith in Jesus and love for our friends, we can bring them to Jesus, overcoming barriers. There are so many people around us who need Jesus’ healing from spiritual paralysis: fear, anxiety, depression, despair, weakness, sorrow, fatalism. Jesus can heal them. Let’s love our needy friends and bring them to Jesus by faith.

How did Jesus respond to them? Let’s read verse 20. **“When Jesus saw their faith, he said, ‘Friend, your sins are forgiven.’”** Jesus’ words must have surprised everyone. They might have expected him to say

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something about the man’s paralysis, or to rebuke the rude behavior of those who brought him. But Jesus did not see only their outer actions. Jesus saw their faith. Jesus understood that they had taken a risk, gone through difficulty, and come to him because they believed in him. This faith pleased Jesus. Jesus blessed the man beyond healing his paralysis. Jesus forgave the man’s sins. It was not the forgiveness of a specific sin committed against Jesus, such as interrupting his message; it was a declaration of the forgiveness of all of his sins. Why did Jesus do this? On what basis does Jesus forgive sins?

First of all, Jesus can forgive sins because he is God. When Jesus declared, “your sins are forgiven,” alarm bells began to go off in the minds of the religious leaders. They began to think to themselves, **“Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone”** (21). Their idea was right. When we sin against someone, it is not just a matter between human beings. It is an offense against God. Though David had sinned against people, he said to God, **“Against you, you only, have I sinned”** (Ps 51:4a). In telling the story of the prodigal son, Jesus portrays the repentant son as saying, **“I have sinned against heaven and against you”** (Lk 15:21a). Whoever sins has sinned against God. So ultimate forgiveness can come only from God. For example, while sharing God’s grace with others at a church, Corrie Ten Boom once met a former Nazi prison guard who had tortured her and many others. This man assumed her forgiveness with a contemptuous grin. She forgave him. But that is not all that he needs. He still needs the forgiveness that only God can give.

When Jesus proclaimed, **“your sins are forgiven,”** he was making a divine declaration. The religious leaders knew this, but did not accept Jesus as God. Jesus knew their thoughts. Jesus saw that they needed more than a declaration. So he proved his identity as God. He challenged them, **“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?’”** (22-23) Of course, for mere human beings, both are impossible. But to God, both are possible. Jesus told the paralyzed man, **“I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home”** (24). Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God (25). Everyone was amazed and gave praise

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to God. They were filled with awe and said, **“We have seen remarkable things today”** (26). Ordinary people realized that Jesus exercised the divine authority of God.

Secondly, Jesus forgave his sins because that is what he really needed. Why was Jesus so eager to proclaim the forgiveness of sins? It is because sin is the root problem of mankind which destroys personalities, families, and communities. However, people tend to see only the symptoms and not the root problem of sin. It is like seeing the symptoms of a fatal disease instead of the disease itself. For example, in the beginning, HIV symptoms are very similar to those of the common flu: fever, shivering, chills, cough, body aches and nausea. So people treat it as though it is the flu. And for a while, the symptoms disappear. The patient thinks they are okay. But the disease continues to work undetected and weakens the immune system. Later, tuberculosis, infections and tumors develop, which often lead to death. In the same way, though sin is people’s root problem, we often fail to recognize it. Sin may begin with a very small act, like eating forbidden fruit. But it has such destructive power that it totally devastated the image of God in man, spread to all mankind and brought forth the flood judgment from God.

In the case of the paralytic man, paralysis seemed to be his real problem. But to Jesus, sin was his most urgent problem that needed to be solved immediately. One young lady looked miserable all the time. She often expressed her bitterness about growing up in a humble Christian family. She complained about her church and blamed its leaders. She seemed to have many problems. But one day she was challenged by the word of God to consider her own sin problem. For the first time, she realized the root problem was sin in her own heart. Since then, she began to repent and receive God’s mercy and forgiveness. Suddenly, complaining and bitterness disappeared. She began to taste freedom, peace and joy that come from the forgiveness of sins. When we acknowledge that sin is our root problem, we can find the solution that solves it completely.

Thirdly, Jesus can forgive our sins because he paid the price. It is significant that Jesus asked the religious leaders, **“Which is easier: to say,**

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‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk.’” We need to think about this from Jesus’ point of view. Which was easier for Jesus? To say **“Get up and walk”** required the exertion of his creative power as God. However, to say, **“Your sins are forgiven,”** required something more. It required that the debt of sin be paid. As the holy and righteous God, Jesus could not simply forgive sins without paying the price. His justice demanded satisfaction. The wages of sin is death. So each person should die for their sins. Death is not the end. After death there is God’s judgment and eternal condemnation. This is the serious result of sin. The only acceptable sacrifice to God was the death of his one and only Son, who was sinless and perfect. In order to forgive our sins, Jesus went up to Jerusalem and was tried, beaten, flogged and finally crucified on a cross, shedding his lifeblood for us. We should know that forgiveness was bought at a high cost; it is not cheap. We should treasure this forgiveness and not take it lightly. The blessing of Jesus’ forgiveness of sins is not only new life in this world, but eternal life in the kingdom of God. It is full restoration in every aspect: body, mind and spirit, and it is eternal. Furthermore, it is not only for personal salvation, but to restore God’s reign over all things.

Jesus did not come to condemn sinners, but to bring forgiveness of sins. Jesus’ words, **“your sins are forgiven,”** are the most powerful words which set us free from the guilt, shame and condemnation of sin. More than that, Jesus’ forgiveness changes one’s status from a slave of sin to a child of God. It restores our vine and branch relationship with God. His love and goodness and strength can flow into our souls and empower us to live vibrant, dynamic, fruitful new lives. Let’s come to Jesus and receive his forgiveness and the full restoration that he wants to give. Jesus says to each of us, “Friend, your sins are forgiven.”