

Jesus' Power to Forgive Sins
Mark 2:1-22
Key Verse: Mark 2:10

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

In the development of Mark's gospel, we have seen Jesus clarify his purpose to preach the good news in Galilee. In this passage, we see that Jesus focuses his preaching on solving man's sin problem. To each person, the sin problem is most urgent. 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. Jesus' forgiveness makes us his children and gives us a dynamic new life. Let's accept his grace today.

First, Jesus said, “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 filled up 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, bad flu, and irritating itching problems. They might have expected more healing. However, this time Jesus focused on preaching. We can understand why through the event that follows.

Look at verses 3-4. “Some men came, bringing to him a paralytic, 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 and, after digging through it, lowered the mat the paralyzed 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 (Ecc 4:10). 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 paralytic, ‘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, human relations, the environment. But to Jesus the sin problem is most urgent. The presidential hopefuls for 2008 emphasize that dealing with the Iraq war, the economy, or global warming is most urgent. However, to Jesus, it is the sin problem.

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, paying taxes, 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 or develop a philosophy to stand on, they become blank. Some people have paralyzed hearts. They never feel love, compassion, or grace, though they received much. They can watch “Ben-Hur” or “The Passion of the Christ,” without any emotional response at all. Some have paralyzed lips. They never say, “Thank you,” or “Praise God.”

Jesus said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." The word "forgiven" comes from the Greek word *aphiemi*. 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 called him "son." Jesus did not see him as a patient, or a customer, or a case study. Jesus called him "son" with great affection. Jesus loved him dearly, even a little more than Rob McHugh loves his son Daniel. When Jesus called him "son," his name was written in the book of life. This marvelous gift of life was given to him by the grace of Jesus through faith. This power of Jesus to forgive sins is available to us today. John 1:12 says, "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." Let's accept Jesus' forgiveness by faith.

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 understood Jesus. Jesus boldly exercised the power to forgive man's sins. Jesus was claiming to be God. In their unregenerate condition, they became very rebellious toward Jesus inwardly.

Look at verse 8. "Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, 'Why are you thinking these things?'" Jesus knew everything they were thinking in their hearts. Jesus knows our hearts. Jesus is God.

The teachers of the law were the leaders of Israel. Their influence spread all over the nation. 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 that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins....' He said to the paralytic, '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 paralytic 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." 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. Our Easter Bible Conferences are not just annual events. It is the time to come to Jesus for forgiveness and the healing of our paralysis. It is time for each of us to become new, for our fellowships to become new, for our nation to become new.

During the last 30 years in America, Jesus has healed many paralytic sinners through UBF ministry. I am one. As a college student, I fell into lustful desires and finally committed grievous sin against God. This sin paralyzed my heart, soul, and even my mouth. I could not speak a few words to others during meal time. The gospel set me free from the paralysis of sin; now I preach the gospel boldly. My dear friend Elijah Ushomirsky had the same problem. But Jesus healed his paralysis too. On his wedding day, he boldly declared, "I do. I will. Yes. Amen." Many can testify that Jesus has power to heal the paralysis of sin.

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. 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. This was regarded as living with Gentiles, and was a breach of the law. So tax collectors were cast out of the synagogue and not allowed to serve as witnesses in Israel. They were regarded as public sinners along with adulterers, robbers, prostitutes and such. Their disgrace extended to their family.

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 when they needed shepherds. Levi hardened his heart to live selfishly, seeking money first for his own survival and pleasure. This may have seemed to be smart. But in fact, he invited trouble and distress into his life (Ro 2:7-8). 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, like many modern people. 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.

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 he only 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. 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.'" Jesus encouraged the teachers of the law to see the public sinners as sick people who needed to be healed. Through Jesus' grace and tender care they could be healed and get well. Jesus wanted the religious leaders to have a shepherd's heart. Jesus wanted them to have hope for the healing of the sinsick souls.

Fourth, life in Jesus is joyful (18-22).

While John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees were fasting, Jesus' disciples were eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners. It was hard for good Jews to understand and accept. They expected Jesus' disciples to fast also. 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.'" Fasting was meant to be a means of seeking God. The disciples had God with them in Jesus. They did not need to fast, but could rejoice in the presence of Jesus. Life with Jesus is joyful, like a wedding banquet. Christian life is a wonderful relationship with Jesus, not a set of rules. It is never boring and habitual, but lively and happy.

In the last two verses, Jesus explains that his ministry cannot be patched onto the Judaism that was practiced in Israel in his day. Jesus' life-saving work is something new. It must find the freedom of expression without hindrance from established norms and traditions. Look at 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." 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." The gospel is dynamic and powerful like new wine. We must be new wineskins, who are flexible to accommodate this new wine.

In this passage Jesus teaches that he has authority on earth to forgive sins. Jesus wants us to experience his power in tangible ways on earth. Jesus wants us to live a dynamic new life as a powerful servant of God. Let's accept Jesus' grace and live with his power.