

“JESUS: Authority to Forgive”

Luke 5: 17-26

17 One day Jesus was teaching, and Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there. They had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem.

And the power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal the sick.

18 Some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus.

19 When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, 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.

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

21 The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, “Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

22 Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, “Why are you thinking these things in your hearts?”

23 Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk’?

24 But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.”

So he said to the paralyzed man, “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.”

25 Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God.

26 Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God.

They were filled with awe and said, “We have seen remarkable things today.”

Introduction

Legend has it that a man was lost in the desert, dying for a drink of water. He stumbled upon an old deserted shack. Next to it was an old, rusty water pump. He started pumping the handle up and down, up and down. Nothing came out.

Off to the side, he noticed an old jug. He wiped away the dirt and dust and found a note attached: “You have to prime the pump with all the water in this jug. P.S. Be sure you fill the jug again before you leave.” Sure enough, the jug was filled with not-so-fresh but clean water.

He was faced with a decision. If he drank the water, maybe he’d live. If he poured it all into the rusty pump, maybe he’d have all the fresh water he wanted; but maybe not. What if he wasted the jug of water and got nothing!

As the story goes, he reluctantly poured all the water into the pump. Up and down went the handle, squeak-squeak, then a little dribble of water, then a small stream, then it finally gushed. He filled the jug and drank from it. Filled his canteens and added another note before he left. “Believe me, it really works. You have to give it all away before you can get anything back.”

Faith is like the decision to prime the pump.

I. Opposition to Jesus Grows (vs. 17)

News about Jesus was spreading through the whole countryside. People were being healed, outcasts were being welcomed, sinners were being forgiven. News of the kingdom of God was being received. So, “one day as Jesus was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the Law had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem. They were sitting there.”

In Jesus’ day, the Pharisees were one of four religious parties, as it were, in Judaism. Sadducees, Zealots and Essenes were the others. Power and influence were based on keeping the Law of Moses and the countless, elaborate rules they had developed. Jesus was calling much of their teaching and their religious life into question. Jesus had no use for rules and regulations that kept people in bondage to sin and rejection. For him the cry of human need superseded such rules. To the Pharisees, Jesus was not only teaching people disregard for their laws but was himself a law breaker.

From this time on Jesus would face increasing opposition. Jesus so threatened their power and way of life that finally the opposition got so extreme that they looked for a way to have him killed.

II. Men of Faith (vs. 18-20)

“Just then,” it says, “some men arrived carrying a paralytic on a stretcher. The house was so crowded that they went up to the roof (a roof of closely packed twigs and mortar), removed a section, and lowered the man on his mat right in the middle of everyone, right front of Jesus.” Luke tells us that when Jesus saw their faith, impressed by their bold belief, he said to the paraplegic, “My friend, your sins are forgiven.”

Notice that it was the faith, the action, the strong belief and hope of these men that moved Jesus. Faith in this passage must mean a visible expression, not a mere attitude. Jesus sees faith in the caring action of these men and, as we will see, gives them much more than they were asking for. These men took the risk, pouring all the water into the pump and expectantly waited to see what would happen. Theologian/philosopher Elton Trueblood said, “Faith is not belief without proof but trust without reservation.”

Singer/songwriter Annie Herring has a moving song. “Number me in your prayers

Let me be among those You cry out for/ Won't You number me in Your prayers

And lay me at the feet of Jesus/ Cover my life with words of love/ And lay me at the feet

I'm going through a time where I don't know my way/ And I must lean on others

Like a growing child/ When hurt or confused/ Looks up to its sisters and brothers
So, number me in Your prayers/ Let me be among those You cry out for
Cover my life-cover my heart/ And lay me at the feet of Jesus.”

Do you have friends like that? Friends with a faith in Jesus Christ? Enough faith to bring you before the Lord?

Or, who do you know on the “injury list” (hurting in body, mind or spirit, on the job, at school or in relationships)? We live in a world of need all around us. Who did you bring with you this morning to hear a message of healing and hope? Will you try to bring those you know who are struggling to Christ?

How is your faith in Jesus being expressed these days? Do your calendar and bank account reflect trust in the Lord’s healing and forgiving ministry? You know, the Lord has given each one of us time and resources to spend on bringing others to healing faith in Christ.

This account in Luke 5 would ask all these questions of us. Do you realize just how much a miracle it is that God has forgiven you your sins in the name of Jesus? You may have heard it many, many times. Perhaps you have become desensitized to the incredible gift of grace in Christ. Let your need for the Lord’s forgiveness and healing be known. The Lord is there to meet you.

III. Forgiven and Healed (vs. 20-25)

In first century Judaism, it was taught that sin and suffering were directly connected. If you were suffering, it must be that you had sinned. That can be true in our day, as the medical profession tries to communicate quite often. Sometimes we’re not well because we have lived unwisely. But accident or illness most often just happens.

Seeing their faith, Jesus begins by saying to the paralytic, “Your sins are forgiven.” That set the religion scholars and Pharisees buzzing. “Who does he think he is? God and only God can forgive sins.” Yet on their own arguments and teachings about sin and suffering, Jesus will dismiss them.

“Which is easier to say?” asks Jesus. “Your sins are forgiven? Or, get up and walk? Just so it is clear that I am the Son of Man (the Messiah-Savior), the one who has authority on earth to forgive sins...” He said to the paralyzed man, “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.” Without a moment’s hesitation, he did! He stood up in front of everyone, took what he was lying on and went home praising God.

“What in the world is going on here?” the Pharisees must have thought. Jesus is fulfilling the promises of the Messiah to come, not only healing and forgiving, but setting people back on a walk of faith with the Lord.

Sin is like paralysis. It keeps us from walking and running a life of faith and trust in Christ. It can destroy the nerves and atrophy the muscles in any relationship. Sin keeps us from the abundant life that God created us to experience. The season of Lent is a fresh opportunity for you and me to come to Christ or bring others to Christ, to trust in him and receive from him forgiveness and healing.

Conclusion

Response to Jesus varies widely. The Pharisees cried, “Blasphemy!” Everyone else was “amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, ‘We’ve never seen anything like that!’”

The success of the miracle recorded here narrows the options. The ability of the paraplegic to resume his walk of life is a picture of what Jesus does when he saves. Jesus has the authority to forgive, to heal, to redeem and to save.

So, when life seems dry, parched, and thirsty, read the note the Lord left for us. Prime the pump with the water of faith in action. Let the streams of living water run free.

Let us pray together.