

Your Sins Are Forgiven You

Introduction

The Text

¹⁷ On one of those days, as he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was with him to heal. ¹⁸ And behold, some men were bringing on a bed a man who was paralyzed, and they were seeking to bring him in and lay him before Jesus, ¹⁹ but finding no way to bring him in, because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the midst before Jesus. ²⁰ And when he saw their faith, he said, “Man, your sins are forgiven you.” ²¹ And the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, saying, “Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?” ²² When Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answered them, “Why do you question in your hearts? ²³ Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Rise and walk’? ²⁴ But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the man who was paralyzed—“I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go home.” ²⁵ And immediately he rose up before them and picked up what he had been lying on and went home, glorifying God. ²⁶ And amazement seized them all, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, “We have seen extraordinary things today.” (Luke 5:17–26)

The One Thing You Desperately Need

- A. I think people are naturally more self-reflective as they pass through the transition from one year to the next. So perhaps your answer to my opening question here will be particularly rich. I wonder, if I were to have stood by the door and asked you as you came in this morning to give me the one thing you feel like you just desperately need today (or in 2017), what would it be? What’s the one thing that you think: “If I could just get that, life would be good”?
1. Maybe you would bring up your physical health, some issues that’s been dogging you for days or even years now.
 2. Maybe you’d bring up some relationship woes—your marriage is on the rocks, your kids are going crazy, maybe you’re still single and your wondering if that guy or girl is even out there for you at all.
 3. Maybe the financial burden of living in Silicon Valley is just crushing you. “I need God to help me with the rent or to finally have enough money for a down payment on a house. I’m so tired of living month to month.”
 4. Maybe it’s: “I just need to lose those pounds. I see those other moms at Whole Foods who always look like they just came from the gym and it makes me hate myself.”
 5. Maybe you’re a little bit simpler. Maybe you just needed that second cup of coffee, but you had to get the kids ready so you could get out the door, and you had to leave it sitting there on the kitchen table to get cold. “He’s getting started and it’s

not going to go well, I'm gonna get that head bob thing going and there's little I can do about it now."

- B. I wonder how many would come in this morning saying: "Okay Nick, here's the thing I feel most desperate for this morning, this year: forgiveness! I realize how holy God is, how sinful I am. I need forgiveness. I need Him to pardon, to release me from debt, so that I can be with Him again, and He can be with me. If I have forgiveness, I have all I really need."
 - 1. Is that where you're at? Because, if I'm reading my Bible correctly, I think that's where Jesus wants to take us.
- C. We're going to divide this text into three headings: (1) The Rowdiest Faith (vv. 17-19); (2) The Greatest Letdown (v. 20); and (3) The Highest Authority (vv. 21-26).

(1) The Rowdiest Faith (vv. 17-19)

Unroofing the Roof

- A. Reports of what Jesus has been teaching and doing have spread throughout Israel. And even the higher-ups in Judaism are now starting to take notice. And they're coming from all over: "On one of those days, as he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem" (v. 17).
 - 1. But it's not just the higher-ups who are hearing about Christ. The down-and-outs are coming as well—i.e. this "man who was paralyzed" (v. 18).
- B. The paralyzed man in our text has some good friends does he not? They're willing to do whatever it takes to get their friend before Christ. Because of the great crowd, they can't get into the house where Jesus is through the door, so they opt for the roof.
 - 1. Houses around this time in Palestine usually had flat roofs with an external staircase leading up to them. People could hang out up there. That's why we read things like in Acts 10:9: "Peter went up on the roof . . . to pray."
- C. So these guys head up to the roof with their friend on a stretcher, but they plan to do a little bit more than just pray, right?!
 - 1. Luke's description of what these men do to the roof of this house is somewhat tame compared to how Mark puts it.
 - a. Luke says: "They went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the midst before Jesus" (v. 19). We imagine them perhaps moving a few tiles around or something and then lowering their friend down through the hole. That sounds relatively harmless, almost respectful.

- b. But Mark gets a little more vivid for us. He says that these men: “removed the roof above [Jesus] and . . . made an opening” (2:4). In the Greek, literally these friends “unroofed the roof” and “dug through it”.
- D. Now, just to be clear, unroofing people's roofs was not a common practice in Israel at this point. This was never a socially acceptable way of entering a person’s house. It wasn't like: “Hey, do you want to come in through the front door?” “No thanks man, I'll just come down through the roof.” They didn't do that. It would be just as crazy and rude back then as it would be today.
 - 1. But we depart from social norms and civility when we're desperate for Jesus. And that's the point I'm trying to bring out here. This is a rowdy faith. They're causing a scene. They're destroying this person’s house to get their friend to Christ!

How Rowdy Is Your Faith?

- A. So much of Christianity in America isn't rowdy—it's comfortable, composed, status quo. We come to a service, we put in our time, and we go on our way.
 - 1. I wonder how many people approached the church this morning like these brothers approached this house? “I'm going to meet with Jesus. I'm going to rip the roof off of this place if I have to, but I'm going to meet with Jesus!”
- B. Let me ask you: How rowdy is your faith? Are you willing to do away with social norms and niceties, to throw caution to the wind, to get crazy, out of desperation for Jesus?
 - 1. There ought to be a Jacobean impulse in us that says: “I will not let go of you unless you bless me!” (Gen 32:26).
 - a. We tend to think of Jacob as a sort of weasely dude. And I suppose he was. But he had this going for him: He knew where blessing was to be found and he wasn't going to look anywhere else!
- C. Back in our text, these guys had given up on other options. These guys, however rowdy and reckless they were, had put all their faith in Jesus. And that's something Jesus can work with!

(2) The Greatest Letdown (v. 20)

Your Sins Are Forgiven?!

- A. I love where the text goes next: “And when he saw their faith . . .” (v. 20a).
 - 1. Isn't that great?! These guys had a faith Jesus could see, quite literally right? “I see the hole in the ceiling and do you know what it's telling Me? You have faith—faith that I can do something for your friend; faith that I'm His best chance at being made whole again.”

- B. But where He goes after this, as is often the case with Christ, is a bit perplexing: “And when he saw their faith, he said, “Man, your sins are forgiven you” (v. 20).
- C. I imagine these guys started hearing reports about Jesus from people around the town months ago. And they started thinking about their friend who had been paralyzed for who knows how long. And hope took flight in their soul as perhaps it hadn’t to that point. They’re telling their friend: “Man, if these reports are true, if this Jesus really is healing the sick and dying, I think you have a real shot at walking again, if we could just get you to Him.”

Then the news reaches them that Jesus has come to town and He’s teaching and healing people. This is it! So these guys get their paralytic friend and they’re running, they’re asking around: “Where is He?”, and they find the house, but it’s too crowded so they’re climbing up the roof, digging holes through it, lowering their friend down before Christ, and as they look at Him, their hope and expectation is brimming. Here we go! Our friend is going to be healed!

- 1. And then Jesus focuses His gaze in on their friend and says: “Man, your sins are forgiven you”?!
 - a. “Wait. What is that?! We went to all this trouble for that? What an anticlimax. We’re not here for sins. We’re talking about arms and legs. We’re not talking about soul stuff. We’re talking about bodies, broken bodies! I want my friend to be able to walk again. I want Him to be able to embrace his family again. I want him to be able to swing a hammer again. Where’s the healing we keep hearing about? Like in v. 17: “The power of the Lord was with him to heal.” We want that! Where is that? What a letdown!
 - i. Jesus, You’re not even addressing the problem our friend is facing!”

D. O but He is! More than we could ever know.

The Need beneath All Needs

- A. Here is where the full trajectory of Jesus’ mission first comes into clear view. We’ve been climbing to this point since He first stepped out onto the public stage back in [Luke 4:14](#).
 - 1. He preaches a sermon about liberation and jubilee ([4:16-21](#)); then He casts a demon out of a man ([4:31-37](#)); then He starts healing every sick and dying person He comes across ([4:38-41](#)); then He redeems and reorients our vocations ([5:1-11](#)); then He touches and cleanses the untouchable and unclean leper ([5:12-16](#)).
- B. But now the crux of His mission is laid bare—above anything else, He’s come to forgive sins. In fact, before He can ever fully and finally liberate us, overcome the demonic realm, heal our bodies, redeem our work, or make us clean—He must deal with this problem of sin.
 - 1. Here is the problem beneath all problems, the need beneath all needs.

- C. The Bible presents the reality that there is one thing at the center of all that's gone wrong with the world: sin. It all started when the creature decided it had no regard for the Creator. Death and darkness spiral out from this point.
 - 1. Therefore, until you deal with sin, you haven't really dealt with anything. And once you've dealt with sin, you've effectively dealt with everything.
- D. So Jesus hasn't missed this paralytic's greatest need, He's going after it with laser focus.
 - 1. That's why I'm referring to this as "The Greatest Letdown". I don't mean greatest letdown in a negative sense, as if the letdown was of the worst variety; but I mean to say greatest letdown in the positive sense, that though this man and his friends may have first interpreted Jesus' response here as a letdown, it truly is the greatest thing that could ever have been done for him.

He Loves Us More than We Love Ourselves

- A. If I could just say one more thing on this point: Physical needs are real, very real, they just aren't fundamental. Jesus cares about them, He just cares most of all about the needs underneath them. He has a compassion that encompasses not less than our physical needs but more. It might sound scandalous to say, but I think this text gives me warrant: Jesus loves us more than we even love ourselves. When it's all said and done, He will give this paralytic not only the physical health he so desperately wanted, but the forgiveness of sins He so desperately needed. Jesus will take this man further into blessing he even knew how to ask for. The Apostle Paul is not just turning phrases when he writes in Eph 3:20 that God is "able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think." No! Paul is pointing us to the reality that our God will do more in love for us than we can even imagine to ask from Him. That is precisely what we see in our text. We come to Jesus asking to be healed of a head cold, and He heals us of the cancer beneath it!

(3) The Highest Authority (vv. 21-26)

The Scribes and Pharisees Are Both Right and Wrong

- A. The religious leaders, like these friends, are struggling with the Christ's words, but for very different reasons: "And the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, saying, "Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (v 21).
- B. Can we just stop and say it: The scribes and Pharisees are right! Ultimately, all sins are against God. And, therefore, ultimately, it is God who alone can forgive them.
 - 1. We might think of David and Bathsheba here where David clearly sins against Uriah by sleeping with his wife and then murdering him to cover it up.
 - a. And yet the climax of David's confession is not "I have sinned against Uriah", but: "I have sinned against the Lord." (2 Sam 12:13a). To which Nathan the prophet responds: "The Lord . . . has put away your sin" (v. 13b).

- C. So who does Jesus think He is saying such a thing?! “Man, your sins are forgiven you.” Well, quite simply: He thinks He’s God. And He’s about to prove as much.

Divine Omniscience (v. 22)

- A. You have to love where the text goes from here. For while these men are secretly accusing Christ of blasphemously claiming to have the authority of God, Jesus is going to read their minds and in so doing prove that He is God! “When Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answered them, “Why do you question in your hearts?” (v. 22).
1. There can be no doubt that we are witnessing a divine act at this point. Jesus is perceiving their thoughts, aware of what they are questioning in their hearts.
 - a. Mark’s record of this story puts an even finer point on it. For He says that Jesus is “aware in His spirit that they were reasoning that way within themselves” (2:8).
- B. So I have a very expressive face. You’ve probably already picked up on this a bit. What I’m thinking on the inside is often immediately evident on the outside.
1. This does not always work out well for me in marriage as you could guess. If I don’t like the dress, she’s already read it on my face before I can say either way. If I don’t want to watch that BBC movie, it’s on my face before I can even choose to love my wife like Christ loves the church and lay my life down for her by watching another Victorian era film or whatever. She can read my face.
- C. But, listen to me, Jesus doesn’t need to see my face to know what’s going on inside of me. He can read my heart. He goes where no mere man can go. “I the LORD search the heart” (Jer 17:10). Jesus is the Lord, YHWH!

Divine Omnipotence (vv. 23-25)

- A. Here is the first indication that Jesus is God and hence has the authority to forgive sins. But He goes even further and gets even more direct: “²³ Which is easier, to say, “Your sins are forgiven you,” or to say, “Rise and walk”?²⁴ But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins’—he said to the man who was paralyzed—‘I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go home.’²⁵ And immediately he rose up before them and picked up what he had been lying on and went home, glorifying God” (vv. 23-25).
- B. The point in all of this isn’t the miracle, although it is astounding enough. The point is what the miracle proves: “that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. . .” (v. 24)!
1. We are to infer from His authority over the physical realm, which we can see, that He also has authority over the spiritual realm, which we cannot see.

- a. If Christ can say to a paralytic, “Rise and walk” and immediately it happens, then Christ can say to the chief of sinners, “Man, your sins are forgiven you” and not even the devil himself can overturn the verdict!

Blasphemy and the Cross of Christ

- A. Upon reflection, this scene finally strikes an ominous note. For it marks the first rejection of Jesus by official leadership from all over Israel. And the charge of blasphemy that they level against him here will eventually be the charge they level against him at the end.
 1. When Jesus is seized in Gethsemane and brought before the Sanhedrin (the Supreme Court of the Jews), and the leaders in Jerusalem are trying to find a way of accusing Him, finally the high priest speaks up and says: “^{63b} ‘I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.’⁶⁴ Jesus said to him, ‘You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.’⁶⁵ Then the high priest tore his robes and said, ‘He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need? You have now heard his blasphemy.’⁶⁶ ‘What is your judgment?’ They answered, ‘He deserves death.’⁶⁷ Then they spit in his face and struck him. And some slapped him . . .” (Matt 26:63b–67). And they will ultimately crucify Him.
- B. He would become the paralytic on that cross. His hands and feet would be nailed down—and His body rendered debilitated and immobile. He's led out and lifted up, though not by friends, but by enemies. And he's not healed by God, but crushed by Him. The innocent, the holy, the righteous One would be punished for our sins.
 1. And all of this so that the forgiveness declared over this paralytic in our text could be accomplished in full, and his ultimate healing in both soul and body could be secured.
- C. The resurrection of Christ proclaims at once two overwhelming realities: (1) He has paid for our sins in full, we can be free from condemnation through faith in Him; (2) He has conquered the grave that once had the last word over our bodies, we will soon be free from death and raised imperishable with Him.
 1. As one commentator writes: “Jesus brings no partial salvation: it is spiritual as well as physical” (TNTC). And we will enjoy it all in full soon enough. Hang on in faith dear saints!
- D. So whatever you come in this morning feeling like you so desperately need—whether it's something relatively superficial like a cup of coffee, or something terribly serious like healing from some debilitating disease—there is something you are infinitely more desperate for lying underneath it all, and it is the one thing above all that Christ has come to offer freely to you to be received by faith: namely, the forgiveness of your sins.
 1. If you get this right, you get it all in the end!