JESUS' POWER TO FORGIVE SINS

Mark 2:1-22

Key Verse: 2:10

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

Today's passage includes two events: Jesus heals a paralytic, and Je­sus calls Levi the tax collector to be one of his disciples. By healing a para­lytic, Jesus reveals that he has power to forgive sins. By call­ing a man named Levi, Jesus reveals that he came to call sinners, not the righ­teous. Jesus' calling Levi the tax collector reveals that any kind of wretch­ed per­son can be recreated into a most useful person in the world. In this pas­sage, we want to learn mainly about Jesus' power to forgive man's sins.

I. Jesus heals a paralytic (1-12)

**First,** they had faith in Jesus (1-9). Jesus spent a good many days for his evan­gelistic work in nearby villag­es. A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the peo­ple heard that he had come home (1). So many gathered at the house that there was no room left, not even outside the door. What did Jesus do for them? Jesus immediately taught the word of life (2). Jesus be­lieved that the word of God gives them life. Je­sus be­lieved that the word of God gives man joy and peace. Jesus be­lieved that the word of God gives man the Spirit of God to overcome the world and be set free from the bondage to sin (Jn 8:31,32).

There were five men. They were very dear to each other. Most prob­ably, one of them had a stroke and he be­came a paralytic. His four friends felt as if they had a stroke. They had great compassion for him. But they were utterly helpless. One day they heard the news that Jesus had come to Ca­pernaum. They cried out, "Yeah, that's it!" Suddenly they were strong­ly convinced that their paralytic friend would get well. While Jesus was prea­ch­ing, some men came, bringing to him a para­lytic, car­ried by four of them. To get him to Jesus, they pushed and wad­ed through the crowd until they came near. Still, they could not get him to Je­sus. People had al­ready crammed around Jesus for healing. Each thought that his or her case was most urgent. No one wanted to concede. But where there was a will, there was a way. To the four friends, a beau­tiful inspira­tion arose, as the sun rises in the east. What did they do next? Look at verse 4. "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." In doing so, they offended many peo­ple. The own­er of the house might have called the police. Other pa­tients who lined up sur­rounded them to punish them. But to the friends, it did not matter what might happen to them. They say that a friend in need is a friend indeed. They were in­deed beau­ti­ful friends to the paralyt­ic. Their compas­sionate hearts to­ward him were flaring intensely, so in­tense­ly that they could not stop them­selves from climbing up and digging a hole through the central part of another's roof and lowering the paralytic in front of Jesus. They brought him to Jesus. Though paraly­sis was known to be in­cur­able, it did not matter to them. They brought this man to Jesus believ­ing that Jesus would make him whole. They had a great faith in Jesus' healing pow­er. May God give this kind of faith to each of us.

This reminds us of a beautiful story about friendship between Da­vid and Jonathan. When King Saul, out of jealousy, intended to destroy David, Jona­than promised to help him at the cost of his life. And Jona­than did as he had prom­ised (1Sa 20:41,42). In the matter of time, David heard of Jona­than's death at war. He mourned, saying, "I grieve for you, Jona­than my brother; you were very dear to me. Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women" (2Sa 1:26). Romeo's love for Juliet was more than his life. So in the end he died for her. But King David val­ued Jona­than's love more than the love of any woman in the world. Jesus said to his disci­ples regarding friend­ship, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" (Jn 15:13). These days we can hardly see friendship among men. But it is good for us to make friends among men, as our Lord made friends with us.

Let's think for a moment about why the paralytic is comparable to a representative sinner. We don't know how he became a paralytic. May­be he had a stroke that left him without the use of his arms and legs. He could not move, so he could not but depend on others to help him all the time. He was a lifetime burden to others. The paralytic was the kind of person the world would be better off with­out. In the Bible, a paralytic is regarded as a repre­sentative sin­ner, for he is powerless to do any­thing. He is also a bur­den to others all the time, instead of being a blessing. Like pa­ralysis, sin makes man pow­er­less (Ro 5:6). Sin makes man lazy. Sin de­prives man of holy de­sires. On the other hand, sin fills a man with sin­ful desires like grow­ing weeds. There are many spiri­tual paralytics. One boy couldn't over­come his lust­ful desire. He gave up his medical studies and died of one-sided love at the age of 21.

What did Jesus do for the paralytic? First, Jesus called him "son." Look at verse 5. "When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiv­en.'" To people's eyes, this para­lytic was a source of anguish because this man was burdensome and smelly to ev­ery­one he met. But to Je­sus, he was like one of his own sons. To Jesus, he was too piti­ful even to look at. Jesus hoped that he would be fully restored. Jesus hoped that he would be a hard-working man. Jesus hoped that he would be a blessing to others in­stead of being a burden. So Jesus said to him, "Son." It meant, "My son, you will be all right." Sec­ond, Jesus said, "Your sins are forgiven." Jesus knew this man needed to be healed of his pa­raly­sis. But Jesus did not think that paraly­sis was his fundamen­tal prob­lem; Jesus knew it was sin that made him para­lyzed. Jesus knew it was sin that made him utterly power­less. Jesus want­ed to solve his root prob­lem, that is, his sin prob­lem. So Jesus said, "Your sins are forgiven."

As Jesus' work grew and grew, the religious leaders sent out a group of people to check up on Jesus, and they were already sitting there. When they heard Jesus say, "Your sins are forgiven," they thought to themselves, "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming!" (7; Lev 24:16) They did not see Jesus' com­passion on the paralytic. They did not see Jesus' power to heal the paralytic. They did not see that Jesus is the Messiah pro­mised to come. They were spiritually blind. They were so jealous that they only wanted to kill Jesus.

Jesus knew that they did not know about man's fundamental prob­lem, that is, the sin problem. So he said in verses 9,10, "Which is easi­er: to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has au­thority on earth to forgive sins...."

**Second,** Jesus demonstrates his power to forgive sins (10-12). The envi­ron­ment was very hostile. If Jesus wanted to help this man further, he had to risk his life. But Jesus decided to demonstrate his power to forgive the man's sins (10). Jesus looked around at the people for a while, and then turned his atten­tion to the para­lytic and said, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home" (11). Look at verse 12a. "He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all." What a great sight! Histori­cally, peo­ple did not even know what sin was, though they suffered end­lessly be­cause of sin. Even if they knew what sin was, they were helpless to do anything except worship the moon or the stars or a rock or pieces of wood. In histo­ry, Jesus is the only one who has power to forgive sins. So Jesus wants us to come to him to receive the for­giveness of sins. When the people of Cap­er­naum saw the paralytic pick up his mat and walk, they marveled and said, "We have never seen anything like this!" (12b) People mar­veled at Jesus' power to forgive man's sins. Jesus' decla­ration of his pow­er to for­give man's sin is good news of great joy for all man­kind.

II. Jesus calls Levi the tax collector (13-17)

**First,** Jesus saw in him the greatness of God. In this part, Jesus calls an­oth­er kind of representative sinner, Levi the tax collector. 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." Levi lived in Capernaum, a trade center in Palestine. He lived as one of the sub­ju­gated peo­ple of the Ro­man Empire. But he was not crushed by the hard situation of the world under Roman rule. Rather, he overcame the adverse situation and be­came a tax collector. If the paralyt­ic was a power­less sin­ner, Levi was a selfish sinner.

Levi thought that money would make him happy. And he made some money. But in the course of making money he be­came a person who was called a public sinner, one who could do anything if only he could make mon­ey. In short, Levi became a selfish man. These days self­ishness is wide­ly con­doned. The devil has deceived many as if selfish­ness is the truth in this capi­talistic society. But in God's world, selfish people are compara­ble to men with leprosy, because they are as harmful to oth­ers as a man with leprosy. Selfish­ness is as contagious as leprosy.

What happened to this selfish person? Levi as­pired to the conquest of happiness. Contrary to his wish­es, he was cap­tured by the power of sin and death. Levi had some money, but he was very fearful under the shad­ow of death. These days many young people cannot go to bed early be­cause they are afraid of night­mares. To most young people, go­ing to bed late at night and getting up late seems to have be­come a part of Ameri­can culture. Prob­ably Levi was an American. How did Jesus help him?

To people's eyes, Levi was too dirty to look at. When we look at self­ish people, we are greatly hurt be­cause they are as dirty as a man with leprosy. Selfish people make others very sick; above all, they cannot please God. But we must learn that Jesus called Levi as one of his disci­ples. Jesus saw the great­ness of God in him, because he was created in the image of God. To people's eyes, Levi looked like a leper who should be avoided. But Jesus invited him by saying, "Follow me." It was to re­store his disfig­ured inner man with a new image of God. To people's eyes, Levi was so selfish and dirty that they never wanted to see him again. If they saw him by chance, they felt sick to their stomach. But Jesus did not see him like that; Jesus saw the greatness of God in him.

**Second,** Jesus invited him to be one of his disciples. When Jesus said, "Fol­low me," he meant, "Come and learn of me and be my disciple." Levi was a man of ability, but it was misused. When Jesus called him by say­ing, "Fol­low me," Jesus wanted to help him until he became a new man and the best man in the world. Later, this man recorded Jesus' Sermon on the Mount: "You are the light of the world" (Mt 5:14a).

**Third,** "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (15-17). What hap­pened when Levi met Jesus? He experienced heavenly joy in his heart. So, for the first time, he bought many bags of groceries and pre­pared a great dinner. It was the expression of his thanksgiving to Je­sus; it was the ex­pres­sion of his spiritual joy. Levi called his tax collec­tor friends, Je­sus, and his disciples, and they all ate dinner together joyfully, munch­ing and crunching (15). Mean­while, the teachers of the law saw Jesus eating with the "sinners" and tax collectors. They asked his disci­ples, "Why does he eat with tax col­lectors and 'sinners'?" (16) These reli­gious men despised and rejected Jesus as one of the public sinners be­cause he ate with persons who were branded as public sinners. Be­cause of their fixed ideas, the tea­chers of the law were useless to God.

What did Jesus say to them? 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.'" This reveals that Jesus came to call sinners, not the righteous. Each of us is one kind of sin­ner--like the paralytic or like the tax collector. Without Jesus we can­not but live as sinners like paraly­tics. Without Jesus we can­not but live as sinners like the tax collector. Men are help­less with­out Jesus. Without Jesus we are all sinsick. Jesus did not come to call the righ­teous, but sin­ners. Praise Jesus!

III. Old wineskins and new wineskins (18-22)

The teachers of the law did not understand why Jesus was min­gling with sinners. They were bigoted and legalistic. They attacked Jesus with a legalistic question: "How is it that John's disciples and the disci­ples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?" (18) Originally, the practice of fast­ing began with a good mo­tive. But in Jesus' time, fasting was no more than a show to be pious.

What did Jesus answer? 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.'" Jesus answered that the time of law has passed and that the time of grace has come. Not only so, but also, the Mes­si­ah has come to the world to save men from their sins. Where Jesus is, there is the kingdom of God. Jesus is joy to all men. So the Phari­sees were asking a totally useless question. Jesus compared his disci­ples to the guests of the bridegroom at a wed­ding feast in the heav­enly king­dom, and he him­self to the bridegroom. So they ate a lot and rejoiced.

When Jesus saw the teachers of the law, they were as useless as a junkyard car. So Jesus said in 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." As long as one is legalistic, he is useless.

Jesus gave another illustration. 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." Jesus compared the Pharisees to old wine­skins. They were, in one sense, good and tasty--like old wine. But their love for God was as dead as the old wine­skins. On the other hand, Jesus com­pared his disciples to new wine and new wine­skins. They were very rough and young. But they loved Jesus. Thus, they loved God with all their strength. Also, they were elastic, dynamic, explo­sive, ad­venturous and cou­rageous in making suc­cess as well as in making many mistakes. Jesus did not hesi­tate to con­clude: "New wine into new wine­skins."

In this passage we learn that Jesus helped a paralytic and Levi the tax collector. One was a burdensome sinner, the other a selfish sinner. Most of all, we learn that Jesus has power to forgive man's sins. We must love Jesus with all our hearts and become new wineskins.