**Authority to forgive sins**  2/4/23 dkm

Read: Psalm 103, Mark 2:1-12

Text: Mark 2:1-12

Psalms: 103:1-11, 130, 139:1-6&23-24, 117

Jesus began his ministry preaching and teaching the word of God, and he never left off preaching the word. John the Baptist came preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, and Jesus picked up from where he left off, although Jesus spoke with an authority the people had never before heard (1:22). Jesus was confronted by Satan and evil spirits, which he cast out with divine authority. He went on to demonstrate authority over sickness and disease as he healed a sick woman, a leper, and many others. The people of Galilee came out in great numbers to see and hear Jesus. When Jesus returned to Capernaum from a brief tour around Galilee, the people were there ready to listen to this man who preached the word of God with authority. The house in Capernaum may have been that of Peter’s mother-in-law or that of Mary, the mother of Mark (2:1).

In chapter 2, and into chapter 3, we find rising opposition to Jesus, this time from men, from Jewish religious leaders in particular. They became jealous that Jesus was attracting huge crowds, and started looking for a way to discredit him; this soon became a way to destroy him (3:6). In the first of these confrontations in Galilee, the scribes or lawyers accused Jesus of blasphemy, but not openly; Luke tells us that some of these Pharisees and scribes had come down from Jerusalem (Luke 5:17).

The Pharisees were a prominent and powerful group within the Jewish leadership. The name ‘Pharisee’ means, ‘separate ones’. They kept themselves separate from sinners. They believed they were right with God because they kept the Law. They were determined to make others obey the law also. Another group within the leadership was the scribes or teachers of the law- many of these were also Pharisees.

We could have given this passage the title, ‘The healing of the paralytic’, or ‘the man sick with palsy’, as translated in the KJV. But Jesus had healed many sick people, including a leper, by this time, and a paralytic was no different to any other sickness or disease for Jesus. Titles need to be brief, but a title that fails to mention Jesus forgiving this man’s sin is to miss the main point of this passage. When the paralytic was brought to Jesus he healed him, but not before declaring his sins forgiven; and this is what got Jesus into trouble with the scribes, and no doubt with many non-Trinitarians and works-righteousness people today.

**1. Paralytic forgiven**

Jesus was in a house, a large house with a central courtyard most probably. He was teaching the crowd that pressed into every available space around him, when some men came along carrying their friend on a stretcher. The man was a paraplegic and unable to walk. Like almost everyone else in the country, they had heard about Jesus and how he was healing people. They were bringing their friend in the hope that Jesus would heal him. No doubt their friend was eager to be healed of his disability.

But the crowd was so huge they could not get near enough for Jesus to touch their friend and heal him; they could not even get in the front door. Did they give up and go home? Did they say, ‘We will come again another day’? These men did not give up so easily. They knew that today was the day. Tomorrow Jesus might be gone. Recall what we said about Jesus calling the fishermen by the lake? It is tragic that so many are putting off listening to Jesus and the glorious gospel of salvation, and putting off responding to the claims of Christ; this is a special danger for young people, but not only the young folk.

People find it difficult fitting coming to church to worship Jesus into their busy schedules. I wonder what it will be like when coming to church becomes physically dangerous, as it already is in many places today. It is wonderful to see you here today. Many are bound up with family and friends, too busy or too tired to come and worship Jesus. Satan is very clever at keeping people from worshipping Jesus. They may have good intentions; one man told me he was intending to come to church. That was a few years ago! It is so easy to come up with excuses. Remember, one day the opportunity to meet Jesus will be gone.

The paralytic and his four friends had a good excuse to turn away and go home; they could not even get in the door. But they would not be put off. They were determined to see Jesus. After a brief review of the situation, they came up with a most remarkable plan. Houses in Palestine, as you may remember from Sunday school, were built with earth or bricks, and had a flat roof. An external flight of stairs led up to the roof. People probably slept on the roof in the summer. These men carried their friend up to the roof, uncovered and broke through the roof to let him down inside the house where Jesus was preaching; Luke refers to the tiling which they apparently removed (2:4, Luke 5:19). The roof may have been over a central courtyard where Jesus was preaching.

Jesus was amazed. He was amazed not just to see a stretcher coming down through the roof, but amazed at the faith of these men. Jesus looks upon the heart. He saw the faith of these men, the paralysed man as well as his friends. The man on the stretcher would have been urging these men to do what they were doing. We are not told how long he had been confined to the stretcher, but he did not want to stay on it a moment longer. He wanted to be free to walk about by himself- and free in another way also.

‘You are sick/disabled because of your sin’ is what this man would have been told, and what he believed. The Jews saw that ‘this man’s sin and sickness stood to each other in the relation of cause and effect’ (Hendrikson). The Pharisees would have been the first to tell him. When the Jews saw a blind man they assumed he had committed some sin. They were confused when they saw a man who had been born blind (John 9). Whose sin was this man being punished for? The paralytic, however, was not expecting his sins to be forgiven because only God can forgive sin. But he had faith that Jesus could heal him. Like the leper, he would have been saying ‘Lord, if you are willing, you can make me whole’.

The men said nothing and the paralytic said nothing. Their need was obvious. Their faith was obvious. The crowd looked on in amazement and hushed silence. Into the silence Jesus spoke: ‘Son, your sins are forgiven you’ (2:5). Silence returned, except now with murmuring from the scribes: ‘Why does this man speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone’ they reasoned in their hearts (2:7, Luke 5:21). Jesus knew what they were thinking.

Jesus looked at the paralysed man, saw his faith, and declared his sins forgiven. ‘What good is that’ some might say; ‘The man is still flat on his back’. Others would be thinking, ‘It is easy to say your sins are forgiven but how can we know this is true?’ The scribes came from another angle. No man can forgive sins, not even super-religious men like themselves. Only God can forgive sins. Jesus was crossing the line into God’s territory. He was guilty of blasphemy- of making himself equal with God (John 5:18).

**2. Paralytic healed**

Everyone was watching Jesus and waiting to see what he would do next. They soon saw his answer, his answer to all these questions. Before again speaking to the paralysed man, Jesus asked the scribes and Pharisees, in the hearing of everyone present, “Which is easier to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven’, or ‘Arise, take up your bed and walk’” (2:9). What was Jesus getting at? Both statements seem easy to say, yet both are impossible for man to do. The question is, ‘What effect would these words have?’ Which words would have an outcome? They did not believe that man has the authority to forgive sin. But then again, a man could not tell a paralytic to rise up and walk either. Jesus turned to the man and said, ‘Arise, take up your bed,

and go to your house’ (2:11). The man got up immediately, picked up his stretcher and went off home glorifying God.

Why did Jesus first say to this paralysed man, ‘Your sins are forgiven’? Why did he say such a strange thing? All the man and his friends wanted was that he be able to walk. Why did Jesus start talking about sin? This is what some may have asked; at least this is what they would ask today. When Christians start helping the sick or the poor, they are told not to talk about Jesus. They can talk about sickness but not about sin. ‘Do your good work in the hospital or in the refugee camp, but do not talk about Jesus’ we are told.

The religious leaders who were present in the house were also taken by surprise at what Jesus said. They were surprised and alarmed when Jesus mentioned the word ‘sin’. ‘Only God can forgive sins’ they said. ‘Who does this Jesus think he is? God!’ ‘But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins’said Jesus as he turned to heal the man (2:10).

Son of Man is the self-designation that Jesus adopted; already Mark has declared him to be the Son of God (1:1). ‘The identification of man’s son with God’s Son was the ultimate blasphemy for which Christ was condemned to die by the Sanhedrin’ (Mat 26:63, 64). But Jesus’ healing of this paralytic was proof positive of his power to also forgive sin. The scribes had no answer to this resounding demonstration of Jesus’ power to forgive sin. They were not at all happy, but the man who was healed certainly was!

**3. Praise God**

The healed man went home glorifying God. His friends also gave glory to God, as did all who were present (2:12) - this does not necessarily include the scribes. It was Jesus who healed the man, and more than that, forgave his sin; but they gave the glory to God. This man must be God. They glorified God because they had never seen anything like this before, a man displaying such authority. They were afraid and amazed, at the same time as they glorified God. How do these responses fit together? A lot of popular worship songs are about glory, but how many are about fear, the fear of God? These responses remind us of Peter seeing the great catch of fish. He was excited, but also feared. He realized he was a sinful man.

This was the first encounter between Jesus and the scribes and Pharisees. Because of proud and evil hearts they failed to see that since only God can forgive sin, and Jesus forgave this man’s sin, that Jesus must be God the Son. Imagine the different lives these leaders would have followed if they had believed Jesus! Just look at the life of the apostle Paul! They would not have spent years hating Jesus and finally killing him, but rather of being blessed in seeing ‘the Word became flesh’ and dwelling among them and beholding the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14). Let us not have proud or evil hearts that fail to see the grace of God in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, our blessed Saviour and Lord.

These people were in the awesome presence of God the Son. Jesus called himself the Son of Man, a Messianic title taken from Daniel 7:13. It is right to fear God the Son, for he is awesome and he is the one who determines our eternal destiny. How wonderful it was for this paralytic to hear the words, 'Your sins are forgiven'. How wonderful to receive confirmation of those words by being healed. Do you know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins? You do not have to wait till you die to find out if your sins are forgiven. By then it will be too late anyway.

Today, right now, you can know that Jesus forgives sin. When you confess your sin and believe in your heart that Jesus died and rose again to take away your sin, you are forgiven. You can share with this man who was carried to Jesus on a stretcher. You can know not only physical healing but much, much more. You can know the joy of being made clean in the blood of Christ, the joy of being set free from the burden of sin.