

A paralytic is carried by his friends to Jesus. St. Mark, in his account tells us a bit more of the effort these friends went to. This is the very fellow who is carried up to the roof because the house is packed with people, there's no room at the door, so a hole is made in the roof so that he can be set down before Jesus. Paralyzed, unable to move, it is painfully obvious what is desired, what is needed. What Jesus says to him is, **"Your sins are forgiven you."**

That Jesus does this teaches us two very important things, two things that we today are quite reluctant to believe. First, Jesus shows us that there is a connection between affliction, illness, and sin. Every bodily malady, every affliction of mind or spirit, is inseparable from sin.

The connection can be explicit, clear. We do suffer afflictions because of the sins we commit. A person who drives while intoxicated and crashes may very well reap the consequence for the sin of drunkenness and violation of the law by becoming paraplegic. Those engaged in the abuse of the body and disobedience of the Fourth Commandment by using illegal drugs may catch an incurable infection. Run with scissors against the admonition of your mother, and you may indeed poke your eye out.

Many people tragically suffer bodily affliction because of the sins of others. Infants are born addicted to substances or with disabilities because their mothers took drugs or smoked or drank during pregnancy. Victims of violent crime often suffer anxieties and fears, their lives are thrown into disorder and can take years, sometimes a lifetime to achieve some sense of normalcy. Sin wrecks lives, it damages us.

This is not to say that in every case of sickness or disability the person has committed a particular sin. Most often, when we look upon the sick and afflicted, we see that sin is far more than just a moral infraction, a deed that oughtn't have been done. It is pervasive, like a foul mist, reaching into everything, corrupting everything, even the body and mind. We reflect back and see how our foolishness and sin have harmed ourselves and others. We suffer the sinfulness of others directed against us. We bear cancer and disease in our bodies. We see our loved ones decline. We see hospitals just for children. It all drives to our realization that this is not as it should be. That we are in captivity to a corruption that we cannot solve, cannot erase. We are driven to cry out as so many in the Gospels do, "Lord, have mercy!"

So we are shown a second teaching that we must confess: above all else, we need the forgiveness of sins. We need God's mercy for us in His Son, come down to this earth, telling us, showing us, delivering to us, concretely, for us to know and believe that our sins are forgiven, that our Father in heaven is not angry or displeased with us, that He does not hold our sins against us. That He is working to make all things new, and that the day is coming when all will be put to right.

This was the very issue that drove the Reformation 500 years ago. It was not just the personal scruples, the tortured conscience of one man that needed to know this. This is the heart of Christianity, this is what all men live and die before God by. At the basis of it was the Word of God. God's Word shows us that what we need is the forgiveness of sins, that this is something that can be accomplished not by man's efforts or offerings, but by the working and promise of God.

God told His people in the Old Testament through the prophet Isaiah, **"Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool"** (1:18). Likewise, the prophet Micah calls to God, **"Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant**

of His inheritance? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy. He will again have compassion on us; He will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea” (7:18-19).

David, in the joy of having his sins lifted from his conscience, declares in Psalm 103, “**Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, ... He will not always chide, nor will He keep His anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His steadfast love toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us**” (vss. 3-4, 9-12).

These assertions of God’s mercy and forgiveness were not hidden up in heaven. They were not just words. This truth was seen every time the animal was sacrificed in the Tabernacle and Temple. The blood to cover sin and appease God’s wrath was seen, a life given in place of the sinner right there before their eyes. God worked on earth to deliver forgiveness to His people, because that is what they live by.

That work of God is seen on earth as Jesus forgives the paralytic of his sins. The answer to our first and greatest problem is given from the lips of Jesus Himself. Jesus does not say useless things. He does not speak half or untruths. The Son of God comes among us, looks at every malady and disease, every sin that we have done, that we have brought upon ourselves, and that we have suffered, and He speaks His word of absolution, of forgiveness, of release from it, straight to us. That is sufficient, that is what we need, that is what is given here by Christ Himself. He shows that His words do what they say by healing this man. He shows that where there is forgiveness of sins, not death but life will win out. That salvation of soul means the salvation of the body.

Jesus still does this. His power, better translated, His authority, to forgive sins is given, the text says, to men, to His church. He sends His Church with the charge to preach this same message, the forgiveness of sins, the claiming back from the corruption of sin one by one, soul by soul. Jesus tells His Church, “**Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven. If you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.**” (John 20:23) Jesus did this so that we in the Church may regularly hear and receive the good news that our sins are forgiven. Jesus said to His disciples, “**The one who hears you, hears me**” (Luke 10:16). The forgiveness purchased by Christ’s blood, the declaration of the Father in heaven, is delivered and sealed to us on this earth through visible means, no less real, the Lord Jesus no less active, that what we hear of in Holy Scripture.

This is true in Baptism. When the minister pours water and proclaims the words of Jesus, it is Jesus Himself declaring the baptized a child of God, an heir of all of Christ’s saving work. This is true in the Absolution. When the minister declares the forgiveness of sins in the stead and by the command of Christ, it is a voice from heaven, indeed, all the angels and God Himself bear witness to its truth in heaven as on earth. The Lord’s Supper is Christ’s true body and blood, not because of some power in the pastor or in his words, but on account of the words of Christ, which declare it forever. The Son of Man’s authority to forgive sins is still at work on this earth, as long as the world endures.

So “Take heart” that is, “be of good courage, be confident,” your sins are forgiven.” With that little word, Jesus tells not just the paralyzed man but also you, to have confidence before God’s throne, to not be afraid, but cheerful in the presence of the great judge, because your sins are indeed forgiven. This is made known and sealed to you on this earth, with the blood backed authority of your Lord Jesus Christ.