

The Meaning Of Forgiveness Of Sins For Us Today.

Text: Mark 2:1-12

Suggested Hymns:

427, 380, 396, 311, 601

1) Is our most important need

2) Is offered to us by the Lord through men

3) Can turn earthly afflictions into blessings

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Mark 2:1-12, ¹ *And again [Jesus] entered Capernaum after some days, and it was heard that He was in the house.* ² *Immediately many gathered together, so that there was no longer room to receive them, not even near the door. And He preached the word to them.*

³ *Then they came to Him, bringing a paralytic who was carried by four men.* ⁴ *And when they could not come near Him because of the crowd, they uncovered the roof where He was. So when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying.* ⁵ *When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven you."*

⁶ *And some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts,* ⁷ *"Why does this Man speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"*

⁸ *But immediately, when Jesus perceived in His spirit that they reasoned thus within themselves, He said to them, "Why do you reason about these things in your hearts?"* ⁹ *"Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise, take up your bed and walk'?"*

¹⁰ *"But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins" -- He said to the paralytic,* ¹¹ *"I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house."*

¹² *Immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went out in the presence of them all, so that all were amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw anything like this!"* (NKJV)¹

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

We Christians must not become weary of having certain fundamental truths of God's Word emphasised again and again. It is true that we like to hear that which is new or exciting. Yet we must not forget that in this world of rapid change there are certain truths which do not and cannot change.

God is eternally the same. His truth never changes. And our need for His Word is always the same. For that reason we must not consider it unnecessary and boring to study old and familiar truths. We can still be thrilled by those truths we know well, if we know how they apply to our needs today. This is true also of the truths emphasised in our text. Let us consider the meaning of forgiveness of sins for us today. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Forgiveness Of Sins Is Our Most Important Need

The incident related in our text took place when Jesus was preaching the Word of God to a crowd assembled in a home at Capernaum. Among His hearers were scribes and Pharisees from all parts of Palestine. The report soon spread that Jesus, the Friend of the poor, the Healer of the sick, the Performer of miracles, and the mighty Preacher, was in town.

Four men who had a friend that was sick with palsy, a kind of paralysis, also heard that Jesus was in town and therefore brought their sick friend to Jesus on a bed. They tried to push their way through the crowd to get to Jesus, but they were unable to do so.

In their determination to bring their afflicted friend to Jesus, who they felt was able to heal him, they climbed to the roof of the house, lifted the covering from the opening of the roof, and with ropes let the afflicted man down into the room where Jesus was.

Jesus saw the faith of these four men and of the man afflicted with paralysis. What would Jesus say, first of all, to this man let down in front of Him? The man had been rendered helpless by paralysis, and it was his earnest desire that Jesus would restore to him the use of his arms and legs.

Jesus, who knows all things, and who certainly saw this man's physical need and sympathised with him in his affliction, surprised the palsied man, his four carriers, and the people present in the house. Instead of telling the man, as most

of them expected, *“Take up your bed, and walk,”* Jesus first of all told him, *“Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you.”*

These words are significant. Jesus spoke to his soul first and said, *“Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you.”* With these words Jesus wanted to impress upon this man and upon all others in the house that man’s most important need is the forgiveness of sins. It is far more important and more necessary even than health itself. It was not that Jesus overlooked this man’s physical need, because He took care of that later, but Jesus emphasised that the man’s first and most important need was the forgiveness of sins.

That is what these words of Jesus mean to us today. The forgiveness of sins is the most important need that we have today. We have other needs, to be sure. We have national and international needs, such as better relationships among nations, among races and classes of people, between labour and management, and the like.

We also have our needs as individuals. We need food, clothing, and shelter. We need a home, employment, money, friends, health, a good reputation, and other things that make for a pleasant daily existence. But our most important need of all is the forgiveness of sins.

Do we Christians acknowledge that fact? We acknowledge in a general way that we need forgiveness, but we often do not consider forgiveness our most urgent need. That is why we are sometimes so negligent in seeking the assurance of forgiveness by a diligent use of God’s Word. That is why we are sometimes careless in attending divine services, where forgiveness is preached. That is why it is important to receive Holy Communion regularly for the assurance of the forgiveness of sins.

Even when trouble comes into our lives, when sickness strikes, when we suffer financial losses, or when we are otherwise afflicted, we are often so slow in recognising our most important need. For example, when we become ill, what do we think of first? Do we not express fears that we may not recover, that we may lose our position, that long sickness will get us into financial difficulties, and similar fears?

But how often do we think of our most important need, the assurance of the forgiveness of sins? Whether we are in health or in sickness, in prosperity or in

adversity, our greatest and most important need is the forgiveness of sins. Without forgiveness we can have no peace of soul.

Without forgiveness we are afraid to live and afraid to die. Without forgiveness we would not dare to stand before God in judgment. But with this word of Jesus filling and thrilling our heart, we can have peace with God, true happiness, reliable comfort, and the assurance of eternal salvation.

2. The Forgiveness Of Sins Is Offered To Us By The Lord Through Men

Jesus has the authority to forgive. Jesus said, *“Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you.”* This word of Jesus also tells us that God supplies our need for forgiveness by offering it to us through men.

When Jesus forgave the sins of the paralysed man, the scribes and Pharisees present began to reason within themselves, *“Who can forgive sins but God alone?”*² In a certain way their reasoning was correct.

Every sin, in the final analysis, is a sin against God. When King David committed adultery with Bathsheba, he certainly sinned against her husband Uriah; and yet, when we hear David confessing his sin in Psalm 51, he said to God, *Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done this evil in Your sight.*³

Every sin is a transgression of God’s Law, and it is God who must forgive. But there is one thing that the scribes overlooked in their reasoning, namely, the fact that Jesus who was here speaking to them was God. This Jesus was not a mere man. He was more than man. He was God. He demonstrated that to them by reading the thoughts in their hearts. He further demonstrated it by healing the sick man of the paralysis.

*Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, “Why do you think evil in your hearts?”*⁵ *“For which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Arise and walk’?”* Of course it is easier merely to announce forgiveness, but it is not so easy to say, *‘Arise, take up your bed and walk’?* because the patient may not be able to do that.

In order, therefore, to show that Jesus was true God, and that He had the power to forgive this man’s sins, Jesus said, *“Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.”* And the man did as Jesus commanded.

There are two facts which stand out here very boldly. That Jesus is both Man and God.

Firstly, note that Jesus refers to Himself as the Son of Man. He was a true man. And that was necessary if He was to be able to say, *Your sins are forgiven you*. God is holy and just. His holiness and justice demanded that the price of sin be paid. The price of sin is death. In order to pay this price, the Son of God had to become the Son of Man, that He, as the Substitute for man, might die for man.

That is why Jesus suffered and died on the Cross as a man, in order that He might pay the price of redemption, in order that He might deliver us from the power of death, in order that He might reconcile us to God. That is why He stood in that home in Capernaum as a man and said, *Your sins are forgiven you*.

That is why we read in the closing words of the Gospel, *Now when the multitudes saw it, they marveled and glorified God, who had given such power to men*.

Secondly, note the other fact which is emphasised in our text is that Jesus is not only man, but also true God. It takes more than a mere man to earn the forgiveness of sins for others. The Bible says in Psalm 49:7, *None of them can by any means redeem his brother, Nor give to God a ransom for him.* A mere man, even if he was perfect, could earn redemption only for himself, not for others. It took more than a mere man to pay the tremendous price of redemption and to overcome the mighty power of Satan. It took the Son of God to do that, and Jesus was that Son of God.

Today He Speaks to Us Through Men

By healing the man sick of the paralysis, Jesus demonstrated that He was true God and therefore had the authority to forgive sins. Since then Jesus has ascended to heaven. He is no longer physically present with us to say with the human voice, *Your sins are forgiven you*.

Therefore Jesus has delegated this authority to forgive sins to man, to His Church on earth. When the Apostle Peter made that fine confession of faith, saying, *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God"*⁴ Jesus told him, *I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth*

will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."⁵

After Jesus rose from the dead, He appeared to His disciples, and told them, *"Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you."* ²² *And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.* ²³ *"If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."* These words tell us that Jesus has not only delegated to us the authority to preach the Gospel of forgiveness, but also the right to say to our fellow man, *Your sins are forgiven you.*

If you tell someone, "I forgive you your sins in Jesus' name," that forgiveness counts before God in heaven. When the pastor in the Communion service says, *"In the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ forgive you all your sins,"* then we are forgiven before God in heaven. "This is as valid and certain, in heaven also, as if Christ, our dear Lord, dealt with us Himself."

3. The Forgiveness Of Sins Can Turn Earthly Afflictions Into Blessings

Your sins are forgiven you. These words can transform earthly afflictions into heavenly blessings. The man brought to Jesus suffered an earthly affliction, paralysis. This affliction brought him to Jesus, and he found healing of the soul, forgiveness of sins, which is a spiritual, heavenly blessing. Thus his affliction was in reality a blessing to him.

Perhaps some of us can trace our conversion or finding of Jesus back to some affliction, and we now thank God that He permitted that affliction to come into our lives, since it led us to Christ, forgiveness, peace with God and salvation.

It is also important to note that forgiveness counts even when afflictions remain. It is also conceivable that Jesus might have forgiven this man his sins, but not removed his paralysis. He might have dealt with him as God dealt with David.

God forgave David's sins, but He did not remove the consequences of his sin. Nathan told David, *"The LORD also has put away your sin ... the child also who is born to you shall surely die."*⁶ David's sin was forgiven. But the consequences of his sin remained.

It is still like that in everyday life. If you drive nails into a board, you may pull out the nails, but the marks remain. If you mar your soul with transgressions, Christ can remove the transgressions by forgiveness, but the marks remain.

The thief on the cross repented of his sin and received Christ's forgiveness, but the forgiveness did not bring him down from the cross. A man may lose his health and money by sinful living. If he repents, God will forgive him, but He may not restore the lost health and squandered money.

Yet when God permits the consequences of sin to remain, that does not make His forgiveness invalid. Forgiveness may not in every case remove all the natural consequences of sin, but it will transform them into blessings.

Think of the Apostle Paul, praying to God to take from him the thorn in the flesh. God did not remove it, even though Paul requested it three times. Instead Paul was told that God's strength is made perfect in man's weakness. God used Paul's weakness for His own glory. Having learned this lesson, Paul could say, *most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*⁷

When we realise that God loves us so much that He can say to us, *your sins are forgiven you* then we know also that all things work together for our good, even those things that we cannot understand and that cut to the core.

Knowing that our sins are forgiven in Christ, our Saviour, and that we have peace with our Father in heaven, we can rest assured that all is well with our soul, no matter what the outward conditions of life may be. Our sins are forgiven. God is therefore not angry with us when He permits us to remain ill, to be financially poor, or to suffer other afflictions. He permits us to suffer these things to keep us humble, to keep us close to Him, to keep us looking up to Him, to keep us by His side, until He will give us the crown of life in heaven.

Your sins are forgiven you. These words of Christ tell you that the forgiveness of sins is your most important need and your most precious blessing. They tell you that Christ has supplied this need and offers you the assurance of forgiveness through men.

That transforms your earthly afflictions into heavenly blessings so that God's strength is made perfect in your weakness.

May these words, *Your sins are forgiven you* be your never-failing comfort and strength, assuring you that you are children of God and heirs of eternal life. And may this assurance help you to overcome sin and to glorify God by a holy Christian life. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ See also Mat 9:1-8

² Mark 2:7

³ Psalm 51:4

⁴ Matthew 16:16

⁵ Matthew 16:19

⁶ 2 Samuel 12:13-14

⁷ 2 Corinthians 12:9