

THE POWER TO FORGIVE SINS

The power comes only from God and is given to His priests -- It is the power of life and salvation.

Matthew 9:1-8

TEXT: *Jesus stepped into a boat, crossed over and came to his own town. Some men brought to him a paralytic, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven." At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, "This fellow is blaspheming!" Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, "Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts? Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. . . ." Then he said to the paralytic, "Get up, take your mat and go home." And the man got up and went home. When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to men.*

In Jesus' name, my fellow redeemed:

Blasphemy, in its strictest sense, was punishable by death. When the High Priest Caiaphas demanded of Jesus: ***I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.*** ... And when Jesus replied: ***Yes, it is as you say*** ... the Bible says: ***Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?"*** Scripture then says that all the Jewish priests and rabbis cried out: ***He is worthy of death!*** Mt 26 They had a Scriptural basis to kill Jesus, unless, of course, Jesus is the Christ of God!

That was not the first time anyone accused Jesus of blasphemy, that is, the sin of teaching false doctrine about God. They couldn't understand how Jesus, a descendant of the tribe of Judah, could just go and tell someone: ***Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven...*** when Jesus was not a recognized member of the priesthood. Jesus was of the tribe of Judah, but only the descendants of the tribe of Levi could be legitimate priests. And so: ... ***some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, "This fellow is blaspheming!"*** Did they have something here? Jesus was NOT a descendant of the tribe of Levi, the tribe designated by Scripture as the priestly tribe chosen by God.

However, Jesus IS God and that makes this incident a most powerful comfort to us, His Church. For THE POWER TO FORGIVE SINS COMES ONLY FROM GOD AND TO HIS PRIESTS. IT IS THE POWER OF LIFE AND SALVATION.

The power comes only from God and Jesus masterfully demonstrates that he is true God. First of all, Scripture tells us that in regard to the men who brought this paralytic to Jesus he ***saw their faith...*** And then we are told that when Jesus' detractors, ***the teachers of the law said to themselves, "This fellow is blaspheming!"*** Jesus also knew their unbelief: ***Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, "Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts?"*** Only God can look into the hearts of men and see whether there exists saving faith or faith that is not saving faith at all.

In which group would you be standing? If Jesus would announce what is in your heart, what would he declare? He who is able to see and discern every thought that is tucked away in file drawers of your mind, will he say: "Pastor Garbow, why do you entertain evil in your heart and mind? Why you can't even get through the Lord's Prayer without your mind wandering! And I know what you are thinking about that person for whom I died. You cannot stand his sin. Yes, he is perverted, a murderous abortionist, a lustful marriage breaker and an abuser of children. But I have shed my blood for him and have paid for each and every disgusting sin, just as I have done for you! I can do this because I am True God! I have done this because I also am True Man whose blood was shed, whose back was ripped apart by whips, whose body was crucified, and then rose again for the public display that all mankind has been justified. That is, FORGIVEN!"

That's why Jesus challenged these unbelieving religious leaders: ***Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'?***

For any mortal man, it's obvious that to utter the words "your sins are forgiven" is easier to say because to say "get up and walk" would require the miraculous power of God. But for Jesus, to say "get up and walk" is nothing. And for Jesus, to say "your sins are forgiven" means that He must suffer and die. ***But so that you may***

know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. . . ." Then he said to the paralytic, "Get up, take your mat and go home." And the man got up and went home. When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to men.

Jesus is God and has the power and authority to forgive sins. Then Jesus did something amazing. He gave this power and authority to those who believe in him. On the night of that first Easter Sunday the Bible says: *Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you. And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.* Jn 20

What a power this is! For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is life and salvation. You have been given that power!

But how difficult is it to appreciate what that means! For example, how would you feel if you were that paralytic who shared the faith that Jesus is the promised Savior, and your friends bring you to Jesus? Mark and Luke both add the information that because of the crowd of people, these men could not get into the house, so they went up on the roof, tore a hole in it and lowered their friend with ropes, placing him right in front of Jesus. Yes, the Bible says: *When Jesus saw their faith, he said... BE HEALED!! No: When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven."* Be courageous! Hang in there! Be strong and confident! YOUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN!! Yeah! (But I thought that I might be healed). Wouldn't you feel somewhat disappointed? I would!

I believe that one big reason why people do not come to church to hear the Gospel is that we are too busy with worldly concerns. They want a "Jesus" who will heal them. I have often been told that the reason why they so not come to church anymore is because they get nothing out of it. Their life is still in the toilet. They still suffer. The problem is that what we preach is still the simple message: *Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.* If they want more, then there is nothing I can do. You have called me, and commanded me to do exactly what Jesus did: proclaim the Gospel. If they want more, they should go to the "government."

But those men who brought this paralytic to Jesus were believers in Jesus. The Bible says: *Jesus saw their faith...* This was a small "congregation" of believers who brought their loved one to Jesus. And this is an example of what we do for one another in Christ. For nearly 40 years I've witnessed this miracle. Not that someone got healed, but that someone was brought to Jesus. And what is more important: to be able to walk, or to be assured of eternal life in heaven?

Let this be our lesson today: Bring your loved ones to Jesus! If they resist, pray the Holy Spirit to give you, not only the words and wisdom, but the patient timing to tell them of the blessings that are ours through the forgiveness of sins. These blessings surpass all the suffering that is on this earth.

You have the power to forgive sins. Use it and explain to those whom you forgive the eternal blessings that are ours in Jesus. Amen.