

## REJOICE! YOUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN

Only God can forgive sins – Only those whom Christ has authorized can forgive sins.

Luke 5:17-26

**TEXT:** *One day as (Jesus) was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law, who had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem, were sitting there. And the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick. Some men came carrying a paralytic on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus. When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven." The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, "Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, "Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. . . ." He said to the paralyzed man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, "We have seen remarkable things today."*

In Jesus' name, fellow redeemed:

Are you a personality that sets high expectations, or are you of the nature to set low expectations?

My wife generally sets high expectations. When we plan a vacation, she plans carefully and has dreams of a really good time. On the other hand, I let her make the plans and look forward to a vacation as a time just to get away. So when the first day of vacation arrives, my attitude changes with the expectation of a few days of just being away from the normal pressures of work. However, the first day of vacation for my wife is met with the anxiety of knowing that in a few days her vacation will be over. "Oh my!" she laments, "We only have 9 more days of vacation left!"

Who do you think is subject to more disappointments? The one with high expectations or the one with low expectations?

People are like that. God made an abundance of different personalities. But how do you think that poor fellow felt when his friends brought him to Jesus to with the hope and expectation that Jesus would heal him from a life of paralysis? The Bible tells us that these were men of faith: ***When Jesus saw their faith ...*** The Bible says that they had such high expectations of Jesus' miraculous mercy that when they couldn't carry their paralyzed friend through the crowd into the house where Jesus was preaching, they carried him up to the roof, tore a hole in the roof, and lowered him and his bed down to the feet of Jesus with ropes. But the Bible says: ***When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."*** Did this meet their expectations? Weren't they all expecting the happiness and joy of a miracle? Instead, all they heard was what you all heard this morning: ***Your sins are forgiven.***

What are the expectations of those who join a church and attend its worship services? I cannot speak to those whose expectations of church membership are earthly related, but I can speak to you and say: REJOICE! YOUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN! And know that only God can forgive sins; and, only those whom Christ has authorized can forgive sins.

As already noted, the Bible says that Jesus saw the faith of these men and the paralytic they had brought to Jesus for healing. What he also was able to see was the unbelief that was lurking in the hearts of the Pharisees who were gathered there looking for a way to discredit Jesus. When they heard Jesus tell the paralytic that his sins were forgiven the Bible says: ***The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, "Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"*** They were correct in their thinking insofar as it is true that all humans must stand before God and answer for our sins and failures to live perfect and sinless lives, with perfect love for God and for our fellow man. If there is to be any hope of salvation it must come from God alone. Only he is able to declare who will be saved and who will be damned.

However, their secret thoughts were critical of Jesus because they did not believe Jesus to be the Son of God. Therefore, they judged him to be speaking "blasphemy," that is, false doctrine against God.

While we do believe that Jesus is the Son of God it is our own sinful natures that remain hardened in its

unbelief. It is my sinful nature that believes that God cannot read my thoughts. It is my sinful nature that plays the hypocrite by pretending that God will not judge my secret thoughts. It is my sinful nature that believes that just by saying, "I'm sorry..." my sin is paid for. It is my sinful nature that thinks that if I can cover up my sinful thinking with outward displays of goodness then there is no harm done. It is my sinful nature that finds its comfort and assurance in blaming others, finding excuses, claiming to be the hapless victim. And when God's Law is directed at me, it is my sinful nature that bitter and angry, lashing back at others with that awesome defense: "Who are YOU to judge?"

***Who can forgive sins but God alone?"** True enough! But then the Bible says: **Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, "Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. . . ." He said to the paralyzed man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God.** Which is easier to say? For you and me it is most easy to utter the words, "your sins are forgiven..." But for you and me to say, "Get up and walk..." is impossible for that would require almighty power which we do not possess for we are not God.*

However, for Jesus to say, "Get up and walk..." is nothing difficult because Jesus is God. Jesus created the world and the universe in six 24 hour days with the power of his almighty Word without breaking a sweat. But for Jesus to say, "your sins are forgiven..." required not only his sweat, but his blood, and his innocent suffering and death. That is what that paralytic believed and the men who set him before Jesus. And that is what you and I know and believe. Only God can forgive sins, and Jesus is God!

So we rejoice in knowing Jesus who has reconciled us to God by his blood, as Paul says: ***God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them.*** And then Paul continues: ***And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.*** 2 Co 5 Only those whom God has authorized can do this, that is, forgive sins.

The Bible says: ***He said to the paralyzed man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, "We have seen remarkable things today."*** This same Jesus later authorized his disciples and all who believe in him to do the same. He said: ***If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.*** Jn 20 This is what Paul calls "the ministry of reconciliation." We often call it "the Ministry of the Word," or the "Ministry of the Gospel."

We will rejoice in this blessed service, or ministry, that the Lord has placed into our hands. It is the most precious thing on earth. We, too, should live our lives with perpetual "awe" in that God has given us this power. It belongs to all believers, that is, to the Church. It DOES NOT belong to any individual person, like the pope, or to a special group of people like ordained priests or clergy. It belongs to you.

It belongs to you to forgive sins of anyone who repents. And as Jesus said, you also have the authority and the responsibility of love to withhold forgiveness from anyone who does not repent, until, of course, he repents. Luther correctly writes in the Catechism: **This is as valid and certain as if our dear Lord Jesus dealt with us himself.**

We live in a world and among a people who are more interested in their lives and comfort in this world. Even we Christians, like the poor paralytic whose life on earth was used by God to suffer paralysis for a lifetime only for this moment when he and his friends would bring glory, not only to Jesus, but to the Holy Ministry of our Lord Jesus that he has ordained for us to do. Don't think for a moment that our Lord does not use us in the same amazing way! In all that we say or do, whether we are living a relatively easy life, or are weighed down and burdened with heavy crosses, that is what we are privileged to do: give glory to Jesus our Savior, and to elevate the Gospel Ministry of the Lord to the highest priority in this life and world.

Some time ago, a discussion concerning the cost of our LES at St. John's. For over 30 years, our congregation has worked hard to support the Christian education of our children. During the course of the discussion, one of our men said, "Let's face it. It's the grandparents who support our school." This was not a put down for our parents, for in the context of the discussion, it was rightly said that our parents do what they can, but with the many costly responsibilities of raising children, they could not do it. But grandparents have lived long enough on this earth to realize from personal experience the value of knowing Jesus. They are in the

position to be able express this hope that their children's children will be in heaven. More than a comfortable retirement, the support of a Lutheran Elementary School in this congregation has been their generous commitment to the Gospel Ministry.

And when the time comes that our Christian parents become grandparents, you also will REJOICE to know that your children and grandchildren know that they will be in heaven with you because God has, in Christ, forgiven their sins, and you have made certain that they have heard this awesome message. It's more precious than being able to walk! Amen.