

Christ Himself is Christianity:
"The Forgiving Christ"
Mark 2:1-12

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Sometimes a story in the Bible has me feeling like a kid in a candy shop. There are so many goodies in front of me that it's difficult to know which one to select. Such were my feelings as I prepared this sermon on the healing of the paralytic.

I was tempted to entitle this sermon, "When Jesus Is There, The House Is Full," but, I doubted that would be true on a snowy Sunday. I considered a country music theme, "We Get By With A Little Help From Our Friends." Of course, we do.

I don't usually remember sermons, not even my own. I do remember a sermon preached from this text, however. It was 1963 and I was a freshman in college. One night some vandalism took place to the boys' dormitory. The next day in chapel, President Z.T. Johnson preached a sermon entitled, "Who Fixed The Roof?" In it, he dangled us over the fires of hell like sinners in the hands of an angry God, but that's not where I want to land today. Instead, I want to call attention to five words in Verse 5. Jesus says to the crippled man at his feet, "*Son, your sins are forgiven.*" Lewis Smedes says, "Forgiveness is God's remedy for a past that even He could not change." The sermon is contained in six words. The first is this.

SIN IS SERIOUS.

The scribes and Pharisees had the responsibility to see that teachers and preachers and other itinerant people passing by taught the truth and spoke the word. They were not about to let just anyone go around forgiving sin. When Jesus dared to look at a man at his feet and forgive his sins, their first question is, "What in the world is going on here?" In Verse 7 we read, "*Why does this fellow talk like that? Who can forgive sin but God alone?*" Jesus agrees in Verse 9 by saying, "*It's easier to command a cripple to get up and walk than to say to a person, 'Your sins are forgiven.'*" In a world that condones so much and condemns so little, let us be reminded there is a Cross at the center of Christian forgiveness. Sin is serious. Christian forgiveness has a Cross right at its center. Never let us take grace for granted.

Sin is a transgression of the Law.

When politicians take bribes, when executives lie, when drug dealers take the law into their own hands, fundamental principles of a civil society are compromised.

The Ten Commandments are more than ten suggestions; they are fundamental rules for living. They are as permanent in life as the law of gravity. E.S. Jones said years ago, "We do not break the laws of God, we are merely broken upon them again and again."

Max Lucado in his book The Grip of Grace tells about finding a short-cut around an intersection where he and every other Texan in six lanes of traffic wait in long lines at a long light on their way to work every day. The remedy was an alley, half a mile before the light, behind a shopping center. Max couldn't wait to show it to his wife. When he did, she opened his eyes to the fact that he was going the wrong way on a one way street. His road less traveled was a route not permitted. "The real problem," writes Max, "presented itself when I came down the road the next time. Now I understood which way the street went. The traffic jam was just the same. Suddenly out of conflict of conscious:

My 'ought to' said, "It's illegal."

My 'want to' said, "You won't get caught."

My 'ought to' said, "It's the law."

My 'want to' said, "But I'm a careful driver."

My 'ought to' said, "Don't do it."

My 'want to' said, "Why not?"

Before I knew the law, I was at peace. Now that I know the law, I am at war. The sign says, "Wrong Way," my heart says, "Why obey?" O wretched man that I am! Sin is serious business. Transgression of the fundamental laws of human society hurts people.

Sin is trespassing on another's property or personhood.

My neighbor has a beautiful lake, but he has a big sign on it that says, "No Trespassing." I've seen Bill Hall catch fish out of that lake for his television show. On moonlit nights I wonder why it would hurt for me to fish there for a little while, but he has that sign up there that says, "No Trespassing." Get off my property—you don't belong here.

I shudder to watch the evening news. Another teacher has inappropriate relations with a student. Another parent has molested a child. Another husband has abused a wife. In 1998 there were 71,831 internet sites dealing with pornography. In 2003, there were 1.3 million such sites. Sin is murder, perjury, adultery; sin is also lust, gossip and jealousy. Whenever we send e-mails that slander a person or spread rumors that hurt a person, or gossip about people at church under the pretense of a prayer meeting, we are trespassing on another's personhood. So we pray, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." Or as one little girl put it, "Forgive us our trash cans, as we forgive those who put trash in our cans." Sin is serious business.

Sin is missing the mark of our high calling.

In her 2005 documentary, "I'm Going to Tell You a Secret," international pop star Madonna warned others about the evils and dangers of "the material world...the physical world...the world of illusion that we think is real." "We live for it and are enslaved by it," said Madonna, "And it will ultimately be our undoing." The former "Material Girl" turned protective mother and Jewish mystic also declared, "People are going to hell if they don't turn from their wicked behavior." Praise

God for prodigals who finally come to their senses.

Poet Carl Sandburg writes, “There is an eagle in me that wants to soar, and a hippopotamus in me that wants to wallow in the mud.” Which will it be for you and me? Are you going to soar like an eagle or be content to scratch in the hen house with the chickens? We were made in the image of God. To betray that image is to miss the mark of our high calling.

Are you going to live to give or live to get? People who die with the most toys don’t win, they leave it all behind like everyone else. According to Jesus the questions on the final exam are going to be:

I was hungry—did you feed me?

I was naked, did you clothe me?

I was in prison, did you visit me?

I was a stranger, did you invite me in?

As you did it for one of the least of these, you did it for Me! To sin is to miss the mark of God’s calling upon our lives and sin is serious business.

So Jesus says to a paralyzed man in a sudden interrupted sort of way, five words, “*Son, your sins are forgiven.*” In the long run I don’t need justice, I need mercy! Our deepest need is not for fairness, but for forgiveness. That brings us to the second three words of this sermon.

FORGIVENESS IS FREE.

In Verse 10 we read, “*But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins... He said to the paralytic, ‘Get up, take your mat, and go home.’*” Forgiveness is free.

Get up.

The words get up are a powerful words. They’re the same words used in Mark 16:6 to describe the resurrection of Jesus. “*He is not here, he got up.*” Like calling a dead man out of the grave, Jesus says to the paralytic lying at his feet—“*Get up, your sins are forgiven.*”

He speaks and listening to his voice,

New life the dead receive.

The mournful broken hearts rejoice,

The humble, poor, believe.

Ernest Hemingway tells a story about a father who goes to Madrid, Spain in search of his estranged son. He put an ad in the local paper which read “Paco, meet me at the town square, noon Tuesday, all is forgiven. Dad.” Of course, Madrid is full of boys named Paco. At the appointed time, eight hundred young men showed up at the town square hoping to meet a forgiving father. If you want to be forgiven, get up.

Take your mat!

Carry the thing that has been carrying you all of these years. Take it up, you have power now you never dreamed of before. All suffering is not a result of sin. There is another principal that is true, all sin results in suffering. Sin beats us,

defeats us, leaves us believing we are no better than we sometimes are. Sin destroys our self-worth. It dims the image of God that lives deep within our souls.

Forgiveness sets free a power we didn't know we had. You are no longer a victim of your impulses, a slave to your addictions, a helpless doormat in the presence of a tyrant. You are a child of God. You are a person of worth and value. By the grace of God and a little help from your friends, you can carry the thing that has carried you.

He breaks the power of canceled sin,
He sets the prison free.
His blood can make the foulest clean,
His blood availed for me.

Go Home.

Don't stay for the rest of the sermon, don't wait for the benediction. Go home. When the prodigal son came to his senses, he got up and headed home. It was time for this weary paralytic to go home.

Henri Nouwen in his book Finding My Way Home reminds us that most of us have an address, but are seldom there. We are out trying to find life here or there. Meanwhile, the real journey of life is to discover the perfect love that only God can give us.

We are homesick— homesick people are grumpy people, restless people, critical people. You know how it is when you are homesick, nothing goes right and nobody does right.

I remember years ago when I was doing a junior high camp in the middle of the summer and a little boy was there, the first time away from home, and he was homesick. We put him in every cabin there was at that camp, but nothing pleased him. He called his mother and said, "I've fallen down in the creek and skinned my knee, and the bugs are after me, and the rats are crawling over me," and she said, "Isn't there anybody there to watch after you?" The little boy replied, "Reverend Olds is here, but he just sits in his chair all the time, he doesn't pay any attention to me at all." I told him, "Robert, you've been here twenty-four hours and you are miserable and you are making all of us miserable. What would make you happy? Is there anything I can do that would make you happy?" He responded, "The only thing that would make me happy would be to see my Mamma come up that driveway to take me home."

Homesick people are like that. I've run into a lot of homesick people in the world. They are grumpy and grouchy and hard to get along with, difficult to deal with day after day and at the heart of it all, they are homesick for God.

When you are homesick you are just out of sorts, not yourself, don't feel good. Nothing will remedy your ailment but a homecoming.

Isn't it about time you headed home?

Home to a self you can live with.
Home to a God you can love with.
Home, where you belong.

In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.
“Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.”

Amen.