

In Jesus' name. Amen.

*We read as follows in Jesus' name:*

And getting into a boat [Jesus] crossed over and came to His own city. And behold, some people brought to Him a paralytic, lying on a bed. And when Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Take heart, My son; your sins are forgiven."

And behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, "This man is blaspheming."

But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" – He then said to the paralytic – "Rise, pick up your bed and go home." And he rose and went home. When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men. <sup>(ESV)</sup>

*This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen.* (John 17:17)

Dear Fellow Redeemed in Christ,

There are two things at issue in our text today.

The first is forgiveness.

Who can forgive?

The second is authority.

Who has what authority and how does he get it?

And both are connected here.

Once Jesus pronounced the man's forgiveness, the scribes immediately questioned whether His forgiveness could be valid, whether He had the authority from God to say what He said. And immediately, they concluded that He was not authorized and so they accused Him of speaking blasphemy.

That idea of authority is a theme that St. Matthew is building throughout his gospel account.

He reports after preaching the Sermon on the Mount, **the crowds were astonished at [Jesus] teaching,**

**for He was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.** <sup>Matthew 7:29</sup>

Then in chapter 8, the chapter just before our text, St. Matthew reports the Gentile Centurion saying, **For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me.** <sup>Matthew 8:9</sup>

and when Jesus healed his servant, He showed He has authority over illness.

Then, as Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee, a storm kicked up and terrified His disciples, but Jesus proves that He also has authority over **the winds and the sea & they obey Him.** <sup>Matthew 8:27</sup>

Then, as He got to the other side, He met a man possessed by demons at the Gadarenes, and Jesus showed that He has authority even over the demons,

who sought permission from Him as He was casting them out

to go into a surrounding herd of pigs, and then they proceeded to drown them all. <sup>Matthew 8:32</sup>

In all these cases, those who witnessed Jesus' displays of authority were amazed and afraid, and often they were questioning among themselves, who is this that has this authority. And so we hear in today's text the response of the witnesses,

**they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men.**

“Such authority,” they said, but authority to do what?

Here we should not just be attracted by the smoke and forget the fire.

A miracle had indeed been performed. The paralytic got up and carried his mat home.

But the authority that the people were astonished with was not the authority to heal.

Remember what Jesus said the miracle was to prove:

**that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.**

So the people were glorifying God that He had **given such authority** to forgive sins **to men.**

Now think about that for just a moment.

Every week, you come and you confess your sins and your Savior.

That means that you examine yourself according to the 10 Commandments and realize you fall short.

That means that you recognize that while you are to be holy as God is holy, you are not.

And every week, your pastor pronounces the Father’s forgiveness to you. Every week...

Thank God that you are so used to hearing those words declared to you,

to cleanse your conscience and strengthen your faith in Jesus’ work of salvation.

But here we have a group of scribes who hear Jesus’ declaration of this paralytic man’s forgiveness and these religious leaders in Galilee are scandalized by this declaration.

It would seem that they were not used to hearing their sins forgiven.

Think about how sad a situation that would be!

And if that is the case, what were they expecting their spiritual teachers to say or do, if not to pronounce forgiveness?

For what reason would you come to Church if it weren’t to receive forgiveness?

Knowing our sinful nature and its inclination to want to be involved in its own salvation, how easy it is for us to fall into the temptation that we attend the Divine Service primarily to offer to God our obedience in keeping with His 3rd Commandment.

Here we sing our praises, we give encouragement and love to our fellow Christians, we support the work of His Church through our prayers and offerings and volunteering...

If it’s a temptation for us to think that we are doing Him a favor by showing up,

how much of a temptation would it have been for the people in that Pharisaical environment?

These Jews had the animal sacrifices still happening in the temple services.

What a temptation to think that you were doing this great thing in bringing the animal to sacrifice, to give it to God in order to appease His anger and receive His favor.

When it reality, He had supplied you with the priesthood and the sacrificial codes and the animals so that He might cleanse you by the power of His Word connected to that blood sacrifice, and declare it to you officially by His official ministers.

We know of the very disciplined life of the Pharisees, how they fasted twice a week, gave tithes of everything they had, and observed traditions of strict discipline.

They did this with the intent to earn God’s favor, to demonstrate their righteousness,

as if they could keep themselves pure and undefiled from sin.  
And if this was how their religious leaders were viewing themselves and their religion,  
what do you think would have been taught to everyone else?

What a burden that would put on them!

And consider the plight of the paralytic. He could not offer those sacrifices.

He couldn't attend to the services. He couldn't do the "good works" of the Pharisees.

What hope would he have?

Do you suppose he wondered if his paralysis was due to some sin he had committed?

What will that do to one's hope, especially since paralysis is not usually a temporary condition?

But this is where Jesus stepped in as this man's friends brought him before Jesus, even through a roof.

Jesus **saw their faith**; and He saw their faith in action as they brought their friend to listen to Jesus,  
something he couldn't ever have done on his own.

He saw their hope that this man would have the opportunity to hear Jesus' gracious words.

And that is exactly what he got to hear.

The paralytic got to hear God Himself declare him forgiven, cleansed of all guilt and shame.

Do you suppose that man questioned Jesus' authority to forgive?

Well, even if he might have, Jesus quickly went on the offensive against those who did for sure  
question His authority to pronounce forgiveness,

saying, "**which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'?**

**But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins."**

The temptation here would be to think it is an easy thing to say, "**Your sins are forgiven,**"  
much easier than "**Rise & walk,**" because we can't see the spiritual realm to actually see sins removed.

But in reality, it's the opposite.

Jesus as the Son of God, could change the reality of the natural order with the snap of a finger,  
or more usually, with the power of His omnipotent word — as He did even in this case.

The paralytic rose from his mat and went home.

But the real work here was the forgiveness pronounced on the man.

While it sounds like just a simple phrase, "**Take heart, My son; your sins are forgiven,**"  
this was something that required more than just a Word from God.

This required a blood sacrifice, not of any animal, not of an angel, not even of a normal man.

Our forgiveness required the righteous blood of an infinite God, so that by His innocent life & death,  
the sins of the whole world (that of these mocking scribes and a despairing paralytic,  
the burdened listener, the distracted youth, and those weakened by temptation)  
are all forgiven by their gracious God.

So while the message seems so simple, and the words sound so easy,

and the reality can't be seen with our eyes, the truth and power behind them is nothing short  
of divine love and mercy displayed and carried out in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

So it was by His own authority that He forgave the paralytic his sins,

and then reversed the corruption that sin causes as He healed the man's paralysis.

The crowd recognized what was going on. **They glorified God, who had given such authority to men.** They were tired of the burden and guilt of their sins and the shame of sins committed against them. They were tired of trying to be their own saviors, of trying to earn God's favor by their good behavior, yet never knowing if it was enough... and always feeling like it wasn't enough. They were tired of worrying that God was always angry at them whenever something bad happened. And for you who are tired of such things, the Lord **has given such authority to men.** And by God's grace you regularly get to hear God officially declare you forgiven by His ministers.

In fact, in the last verses of St. Matthew's Gospel, you hear your Lord speak of His authority and what He desires to do with it. He says,

**"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.**

**Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,**

**baptizing ... and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.**

What He has commanded us is to receive His forgiveness.

And this is the primary reason that you come to the Divine Service.

You come as a penitent sinner to be carried into God's presence

and to hear Him pronounce your sins forgiven, not because of what you have done or not done, but because of what Jesus has done for you.

And then you glorify God, you respond to His forgiveness, who has given such authority to men, not based upon the goodness or piety of these men themselves, but based upon Jesus' calling and authority.

And for those who receive His forgiveness through His Word, through Baptism and the Lord's Supper, His promise is: **And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.**<sup>Matthew 28:18-20</sup>

Thanks be to God.

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

*Soli Deo Gloria*